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WIT AND HUMOR:

THEIR USE AND ABUSE.

BY

WILLIAM MATHEWS, LL.D.,

AUTHOR OF "WORDS, THEIR USE AND ABUSE," "ORATORY AND ORATORS," "MEN, PLACES, AND THINGS," ETC., ETC.

"Le méchant n'est jamais comique," is wisely remarked by Count De Maistre; . . . and the converse is equally true: le comique, le vrai comique, n'est jamais méchant.—ARCHDEACON HARE.

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PREFACE.

"I WILL find you twenty men," says that wise clerical humorist, Dr. Leonard Withington, in his entertaining work, "The Puritan," "who will write you systems of metaphysics over which the world shall yawn and doze and sleep, and pronounce their authors oracles of wisdom, for one who can trifle like Shakspeare, and teach the truest philosophy when he seems to trifle most." Believing that the *wisdom* and usefulness of the comic "teachers of true philosophy," especially those of the highest order, are not in general duly appreciated; that we Americans need their aid more, perhaps, than any other people, not only because we are overworked and over-serious, and need increased play to balance the excess, but because, as the late Edwin P. Whipple has observed, we too generally lack the faculty or feeling of ridicule, the counterfeit detector all over the world, and "are therefore gulled by all those pretences which require a vivid sense of the ludicrous to be detected;" believing, too, that wit

and humor, so potential for good, are too often perverted by us to illegitimate uses, — I have been tempted to write this book. As it follows so soon my book of last year, I may add that some years have passed since I began making notes upon the subject, and that the first draught of the work was completed eighteen months ago.

W. M.

BOSTON, *July 28, 1888.*

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WIT AND HUMOR;

THEIR USE AND ABUSE.

CHAPTER I.

THEORIES OF WIT AND HUMOR.

It [facetiousness] is a thing so versatile and multiform, . . . that it seemeth no less hard to settle a clear and certain notice thereof, than to make a portrait of Proteus, or to define the figure of the fleeting air. — BARROW.

WHAT is wit, and what is humor? At the threshold of a disquisition on wit and humor, we are confronted with these questions, to which the acutest writers have given the most contradictory answers. There are many things which a definition helps us to understand; but there are other things which we understand better than we can any possible definition of them, — and among them are that cold, sparkling, mercurial thing which we call wit, and that genial, juicy, unconscious, impersonal thing which we call humor. As a man, like M. Jourdain, may talk prose all his life without knowing it, or may argue logically, with subtlety and acuteness, like Mr. Shandy, without knowing a syllogism in Barbara from one in Celarent, so he may be witty and appreciate wit, or a humorist and enjoy humor, without being able to define it; and if he attempts to do so, the probability is that he will do it in so dull a way as to

remind us of the gentleman who, according to Addison, "wrote upon the sublime in a dull and grovelling style." The truth is, that, as a jest will not bear explanation, so neither will wit nor humor bear to be anatomized. In vain do we place it on our metaphysical dissecting-table, and attempt with our intellectual scalpel to lay bare the hidden places of its power. It mocks all our efforts, as does beauty that of Mendelssohn and others, when they try to catch it as a butterfly and pin it down for inspection. They succeed, Goethe tells us, in the same way as they are likely to succeed with the butterfly: the poor animal trembles and struggles, and all its brightest colors are gone; or, if you catch it without spoiling the colors, you have at best a stiff and awkward corpse. "Who can make mathematics out of merriment? Who can postulate a pun? Who can square the circle of a joke? The calculus of cachinnation would be a pleasant kind of cyphering! One sometimes hears of the philosophy of humor. The phrase itself is most humorous. The philosophy of humor would be truly the humor of philosophy."

All the attempts made to explain wit, — and they have been many, and some of them by the acutest thinkers, — show that it defies analysis, and cannot be clipped, shaped, or fashioned so as to fit any precise definition or description. Like that of music, its charm is subtile and impalpable; or, rather, it is like those essences, which, too delicate to bear the open air, evaporate as soon as they are exposed to it. It is too volatile, too electrical, to be put into any scales and weighed; and if one tries to measure it with a two-foot rule, it escapes altogether. Barrow, in his famous description of wit, has attempted to enumerate the various forms of it, but has failed because the *differentia* —

the various species of wit — are too numerous to be compressed within any description. He confesses his failure by closing his enumeration with the statement that wit "often consisteth in one knows not what, and springeth up one can hardly tell how." The one common effect which he ascribes to all the various manifestations of humor that he names, is the production of "an unusual and a grateful tang;" but he does not attempt to trace in them any general quality, or what chemists would call a common "active principle." Nor is this strange. As well might you attempt to depict the lightning, or to define the ever-shifting colors of the expiring dolphin, as try to define or adequately to describe wit, for it is a perfect Proteus, assuming a thousand different forms, and rivalling the vagaries of a will-o'-the-wisp. The name given to it by the French, *esprit*, denotes an essence which is too impalpable to be accurately characterized. How different is the wit of Fuller from that of South, or Sheridan's from that of Swift, or Heine's from that of Jean Paul; and how little resemblance have the writings of any one of them to those of Sydney Smith, Hood, or Pascal!

Again, the manner in which a witticism is uttered has much to do with its pungency. Who does not know that a jest or story which as told by one man hardly provokes a smile, if it does not fall flat on the ear of the hearer, will as told by another "set the tables in a roar"? Some of the most mirth-provoking wags are those that enter most deeply into the spirit of their stories, and whose lungs crow like chanticleer over their own jokes. It is not merely the dry jest, but the zest also with which it is uttered, — the relish which the narrator himself has of it, — that we sympathize with. What Cicero said of Antony is true of many

other jesters: "In eo facetiæ quæ nulla arte tradi possunt." There are sarcasms the point of which lies almost wholly in the tone, the inflection of the voice, in which they are uttered, — as was illustrated many years ago, when Marcus Morton, for twenty years Democratic candidate for governor of Massachusetts, was elected to that office by a majority of one vote. It was the custom then, when the governor issued his annual proclamation for Thanksgiving, to send by the sheriff of each county a copy of the same, printed on a large hand-bill, to every clergyman, to be read from his pulpit. The proclamation invariably closed, after the governor's signature, with the exclamation, "God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!" On the year referred to, a venerable clergyman, of the Whig party, laid the broad sheet containing the newly-elected magistrate's proclamation on his reading-board, and after reading it to his people with ill-disguised aversion, announced the official signature in an interrogatory tone, with the rising inflection, thus: "M-a-r-c-u-s M-o-r-t-o-n, G-o-v-e-r-n-o-r? *God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!*" When John Randolph, the eccentric member of Congress from Virginia, was at the height of his reputation, a young aspirant for political fame attacked him in a long and abusive speech. When the young man had concluded, the Thersites of Congress arose, and, pointing his long skinny finger toward his opponent's seat, asked with a half-inquiring, half-contemptuous look: "Mr. Speaker, who's that?" The words were not noteworthy; but there was a sarcastic bitterness in Randolph's manner, under which the offender quailed. It is said that though no one could put more meaning into a given number of words than Talleyrand, — a single word of whose picturesque, condensed language often performed the office of a

sentence or even sentences, — yet his poignant witticisms owed half their effect to his look, manner, and voice, a tone of which sometimes almost sufficed to convey his meaning, and rendered many words superfluous.

It is well known, again, that "a jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it," as well as in the tongue of its maker. It is a plant that has its own proper soil and atmosphere, and almost always suffers by being transplanted. The electrical effect of wit or humor is so closely connected with the time, place, and circumstances of its utterance, that separated from them, divorced from the occasion and the incidents that prompted it and prepared the hearer for its reception, it loses much of its significance and force. As neither the roses plucked, nor the champagne uncorked yesterday, retain their original charms to-day, so the aroma, the volatile essence of wit, escapes after it is uttered, and only a dull residuum is left. How many of the witticisms that delighted our ancestors, or men in ancient times or in other countries, are to us utterly dull and pointless! As has been said of the old English political songs which were so effective in their day, these jests are like the frozen words that Pantagruel found in his Rabelaisian voyage, — we have to thaw them out in the heat of our imagination before we can make much out of them. Even printed wit, torn from its context, loses much of its point; how much, then, must spoken wit suffer from repetition to different, perhaps unsympathetic hearers, who are not *en rapport* with the speaker, or to whom it is unseasonable and ill-timed! How weak or even puerile does a witticism which has electrified a House of Commons or a House of Representatives, often become when reported in a newspaper, or otherwise removed out of its own sustaining atmosphere! It is well known that

the most senile anecdote, wretchedly told, will be endured by the House of Commons from a favorite, and even elicit a laugh, while an unknown man will be greeted with a groan in return for an epigram. We even laugh one day at what would not excite a smile on another, — so much does the effect of wit depend upon the state of the hearer's mind. Swift observes that "nothing is so tender as a piece of wit, or so apt to suffer much in the carriage. Some things are extremely witty to-day, or fasting, or in this place, or over a bottle, any of which by the smallest transposal or misapplication is nearly annihilated. Thus wit has its walks and purlieus, out of which it may not stray the breadth of a hair upon peril of being lost."

Unsatisfactory as have been all the attempted definitions of wit, it may be interesting to consider some of the principal ones, which, though too broad or too narrow, — that is, including much that is not, or excluding much that is, wit, — yet contain more or less of truth. Originally the term "wit," from the Anglo-Saxon *witan* "to know," meant the faculty that perceives, knows, and understands, or intellect generally. A "witte" meant a wise man, and the Saxon parliament was called "the Wittenagemot." Shakspeare, Milton, Newton, and Locke would formerly have been called "great wits." In a similar sense we now use the words "to wit" (to know), "witling," "witless," "half-witted." Locke identifies wit with liveliness of imagination; Dryden, with fancy, genius, or aptitude, as in the lines, —

> "Great wits to madness nearly are allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

Locke contrasts wit with judgment, — the former, he says, "lying mostly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting them

together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy;" whereas "judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, — in separating carefully one from another ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitudes, and by affinity to take one thing for another." This definition was probably suggested to Locke by Hobbes, who says that those who observe the similitudes of things that pass through their imagination, in case they are such as are rarely observed by others, "are said to have a good wit, — by which is meant on this occasion a good *fancy*. But they that observe their differences and dissimilitudes . . . are said to have a good judgment."

Addison quotes Locke's definition as the most philosophical account of wit he has ever met with, only qualifying it by adding that no resemblance of ideas is wit unless it be one "that gives delight and surprise to the reader." He then proceeds to give a list of the various species of wit, such as "metaphors, similitudes, allegories, enigmas, mottoes, *parables*, *fables*, *dreams*, *visions*, *dramatic writings*, burlesque, and all the methods of allusion," — from which we may learn that in the time of the "Spectator" wit was a broader and more comprehensive term than it now is, and denoted all ideas of a fanciful or whimsical nature. The objection to Locke's definition is that it is too broad; for, as Harris in his "Hermes" has observed, a demonstration of the equality of the three angles of a right-angled triangle to two right ones would, according to this definition, be a piece of wit instead of an act of judgment or understanding, and Euclid's Elements a collection of epigrams. On the other hand, the detection and exposure of differences

in things resembling each other, since it is a mental act that implies nice and subtle observation, is common to both wit and judgment, or the reasoning faculty. Addison's definition, again, is faulty in a similar way to Locke's. It includes too much, since the discovery of a congruity between ideas which excites delight and surprise produces the feeling of the beautiful or the sublime, as well as of wit. Nothing would be easier than to cite from the masterpieces of eloquence and poetry passages which, by their assemblage of grand or beautiful images, fully correspond with Addison's definition. Erskine's famous vindication of Liberty, in which he rebuts the common arguments against it drawn from its abuses, by analogies taken from the material world; also his picture of the savage addressing the governor of a British colony (in the defence of Stockdale); Burke's description of Marie Antoinette; and Milton's portrayal of Satan, — must all be pronounced witty, if we accept the "Spectator's" view of wit. In each of these well-known passages there is an assemblage of congruous ideas that "excite both delight and surprise;" yet who would think of calling any one of these passages "witty"? The last-mentioned is not witty, because it is sublime: —

"He scarce had ceased, when the superior fiend
Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield,
Ethereal temper, massy, large, and round,
Behind him cast: the broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening, from the top of Fesolé,
Or in Valdarno to descry new lands,
Rivers, or mountains in her spotty globe.
His spear — to equal which the tallest pine,
Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast
Of some great ammiral, were but a wand —
He walked with, to support uneasy steps
Over the burning marle."

So with the following passage from the Wizard's address to Lochiel, in Campbell's poem: —

> "Lochiel! Lochiel! though my eyes I should seal,
> Man cannot keep secret what God would reveal.
> 'T is the sunset of life gives me mystical lore,
> And coming events cast their shadows before."

This is not witty, because the beauty of the figure excites feelings of awe as well as of admiration.

The following passage from Sterne contains all the elements of wit as defined by Addison, but is not witty, because it is something more: —

> "'A-well-a-day! do what we can for him,' said Trim, maintaining his point, 'the poor soul will die.' '*He shall not die, by* —— *!*' cried my Uncle Toby. The accusing spirit which flew up to Heaven's chancery with the oath blushed as he gave it in, and the recording angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out forever."

Again, Addison tells us that "true wit consists in the resemblance and congruity of ideas; false wit in the resemblance and congruity of words." So far is this from being true that the very essence of true wit consists in bringing dissimilar ideas into juxtaposition, or in suggesting some idea the very opposite of that which the words used were intended to convey when taken literally. Unless the contrast is startling, and the idea evoked unexpected, we do not call it wit.

Dryden describes wit by language which simply describes good writing. He calls it "a propriety of thoughts and words, or thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject," — which would make Euclid or La Place a prince of wits, Virgil a wittier man than Martial, Milton than Foote, and Butler's "Analogy" a storehouse of most pungent jests. A similar objection applies to Pope's definition: —

> "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."

According to this, Bacon's "Essays," Milton's "Il Penseroso," Blair's "Grave," and Gray's "Elegy" are all witty; Massillon is one of the greatest wits that ever lived; and Robert Hall's sermon on the death of the Princess Charlotte is a prodigy of facetiousness.

Sir Richard Blackmore's idea of wit is "a series of high and exalted ferments," — which, we fear, only those who are in "a high and exalted ferment" can understand. Dr. Johnson tells us that wit may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as "a kind of *concordia discors;* a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike," — a definition which is better than any we have yet quoted, but from which it follows that to have discovered the identity of the diamond with charcoal, or the correlation of the physical forces, must have been a stroke of wit full of exquisite pleasantry!

Dr. Campbell, in his "Rhetoric," says that it is the design of wit "to excite in the mind an agreeable surprise, . . . solely from the imagery she employs, or the strange assemblage of related ideas presented to the mind. This end is effected in one or another of these three ways, — first, in debasing things pompous, or seemingly grave; secondly, in aggrandizing things little and frivolous; thirdly, in setting ordinary objects, by means not only remote, but apparently contrary, in a particular and uncommon point of view." This is rather a description of some of the effects of wit than a definition of the thing itself. As an exhaustive analysis of the operations of wit it is altogether incomplete, for wit may discover relations between great objects

without debasing them, or between little objects without exalting them. Moreover, the three ends may be accomplished by eloquence as well as by wit. It is a great mistake to liken the former, as Dr. Campbell does, to a plane mirror, which faithfully reflects the object in color, size, and posture. Again, there is a great deal of genuine wit which excites anything but an "*agreeable* surprise." Ridicule is a branch of wit, yet the effect upon its victim, however surprising, is far from agreeable. Like satire and sarcasm, it often produces a feeling of implacable wrath and desire for revenge. The remarks which Coleridge wrote upon the cover of Charles Lamb's copy of Donne's Satires would hardly excite an agreeable surprise in the mind of a Scotch reader: "The irregular measure of this verse is only convertible into harmony by the feelings of the reader. I would like to hear a Scotchman read Donne. If he read it as it should be read, I would think either that he was not in reality a Scotchman, or that *his soul had been geographically slandered by his body.*" Still, the literature of wit furnishes many examples of the three kinds of wit described by Dr. Campbell; as, first, in the following passage from "Hudibras:"—

> "And now had Phœbus in the lap
> Of Thetis taken out his nap,
> And, like a lobster boiled, the morn
> From black to red began to turn."

In the following passage from the same poem, although there is no direct comparison made, qualities of real dignity are degraded by being associated with things mean and frivolous:—

> "For when the restless Greeks sat down
> So many years before Troy town,
> And were renowned, as Homer writes,
> For well-soled boots no less than fights."

As examples of the mock-heroic, take this from the "Rape of the Lock:" —

> "Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast
> When husbands, or when lap-dogs, breathe their last;"

and this from the same poem: —

> "Here thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take, and sometimes tea."

The effect of Gulliver's Journey to Lilliput is due to its prolonged and matchless strain of the mock-heroic. Take, as a sample, this exquisite description of the Emperor of Lilliput: —

"He is taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his court, — which alone is enough to strike an awe into his beholders. His features are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip and arched nose. His complexion olive, his countenance erect, his body and limbs well-proportioned, all his motions graceful, and his deportment majestic. For the better convenience of beholding him I lay on my side, so that my face was parallel to his; and he stood but three yards off: however, I have had him many times since in my hand, and cannot therefore be deceived in the description. He held his sword drawn in his hand to defend himself if I should happen to break loose. It was almost three inches long; the hilt and scabbard were gold enriched with diamonds."

Of the third form of wit is this comparison from Hood's "Epistle to Rae Wilson:" —

> "My heart ferments not with the bigot's leaven;
> All creeds I view with toleration thorough,
> And have a horror of turning heaven
> Into anybody's rotten borough."

Sydney Smith, after pointing out with much keenness of discrimination the defects in many definitions of wit, proceeds to give one of his own. "Whenever," he tells us,

"there is a superior act of intelligence in discerning a relation of ideas, which relation excites surprise *and no other high emotion*, the mind will have a feeling of wit." That surprise is the first feeling provoked by wit, — at least by wit that is new to us, — is, I think, evident. We all have a standard of beauty or fitness, more or less distinct, by which we judge of the external impressions we receive; and to find our standard set at nought, and our customary ideas of propriety unexpectedly defied, though not absolutely outraged, is a sure provocative of mirth. "For the act of laughter," says Sir Thomas Browne, "which is a sweet contraction of the muscles of the face, and a pleasant agitation of the vocal organs, is not merely voluntary, or totally within the jurisdiction of ourselves; but new, or unusual, or unexpected jocundities, which present themselves to any man in his life at some time or other, will have activity enough to excitate the earthiest soul, and raise a smile from the most composed tempers." Again, that the force of a witticism arises partly from surprise, is shown by the language in which we describe it. The phraseology we employ, the terms "strokes," "sallies," and "flashes" of wit, all point to the circumstance that wit is something unexpected, something that does not obviously arise in the usual sequence of ideas. A stroke of wit is a feat of intellectual dexterity that occasions surprise and admiration similar to those that are produced by feats of sleight-of-hand; and, indeed, an acute English writer has styled a juggler a wit in things, and a wit a juggler in ideas. Bacon says: "Ipsa titillatio, si premoneas, non magnopere in risum valet." Nothing so neutralizes the electrical effect of wit, so discourages mirth, as to announce that one is about to say something witty.

That surprise is an essential ingredient of wit is shown further by the fact that a jest suffers by repetition. However brilliant or sparkling it may be, its original electrical effect cannot be produced a second time. The sober approbation that follows its repetition, as Sydney Smith observes, is as different from its original, rapid, pungent volatility as a bottle of champagne that has been opened three days is from one that has at that very instant emerged from the darkness and coolness of the cellar.

But unexpectedness is not the only ingredient of wit; there must also be ingenuity. Unless, in addition to the feeling of surprise, there is also a feeling of admiration excited by the ingenuity or mental adroitness displayed, a saying will not strike us as witty. Let us examine some striking instances of wit, and see if they are not indebted to surprise for one element of their effect.

Louis XIV., being wearied by the importunities of one of his generals at a levée, cried out loudly enough to be overheard: "That officer is the most troublesome in the whole army." "Your Majesty's enemies," he retorted, "have said the same thing more than once." Apparently admitting the imputation against him, he surprises us by repelling it in the same breath, or rather by turning it into a compliment. In a mixed company the question was asked, "When does a lady look most interesting?" A grave man having answered, with solemn deliberation, "*When she is stealing*," every one else looked surprised and perplexed; but after he had completed the sentence and the explanation, "*When she is stealing your heart*," a burst of merriment followed. Reynolds the dramatist, observing to Morton the thinness of the house at one of the former's plays, added that he supposed it was owing to the war. "No,"

replied Morton, "I should judge it owing to the *piece*." To some people who had come into his chapel to avoid the rain, Rowland Hill once said: "Many people are to be blamed for making religion a cloak; but I do not think those much better who make it an umbrella." Sydney Smith tells a story of a gentleman residing in Paris, who, living very unhappily with his wife, used, for twenty years, to pass his evenings at the house of another lady whose society he greatly enjoyed. His wife died, and all his friends urged him to marry the lady in whose society he had been so happy. "No," he replied, "I certainly will not, for if I marry her, I shall not know where to spend my evenings."

Alexander Pope, one day when epigrams and impromptus were under discussion at table, borrowed Lord Chesterfield's diamond, and wrote on a wine-glass: —

> "Accept a miracle instead of wit;
> See two dull lines by Stanhope's pencil writ."

Dr. Samuel Garth, author of the mock-heroic poem, "The Dispensary," was one day attending on the Duke of Marlborough, and had prescribed a very disagreeable potion, which the great warrior objected to taking. The Duchess, Sarah, joined her entreaties to the doctor's, exclaiming with her usual vehemence: "I'll be hanged if it does n't cure you." "There, my lord," quietly interposed Garth, "you had better swallow it; you will gain, either way." Addison in one of his plays makes an undertaker thus upbraid a "mute" who had laughed at a funeral: "You rascal, you! I have been raising your wages for these two years past, on condition that you should appear more sorrowful; and the higher wages you receive, the happier you look." A statesman who had turned Catholic at the accession of James II., was expressing to Halifax his fears that in an-

other matter he had displeased the king. "Be of good cheer, my lord," was the consoling reply; "thy faith hath made thee whole." Coleridge says of certain persons that they are like musical-glasses, — to produce their finest tones you must keep them wet.

In all the foregoing examples of wit, it is plain, I think, that it is from surprise that their effect springs. The following anecdote produces upon the mind the effect of wit:

"A gentleman owned four lots adjoining a Jewish burying-ground in the upper part of the city. The owners of the cemetery wanted to purchase these lots; but as the price they offered was no equivalent for their value, the gentleman refused to accept it. At last the Jew trustees hit upon what they considered a master-stroke of policy, and meeting Mr. V—— a few days afterward, said: 'Ah, sir, we tink you will not get anybody now to live on your property up dere. We have buyed lots on de odder side, and behint it, and it is Jews' burying-ground all around it.' 'Very well,' replied Mr. V——, 'I shall begin to build tomorrôw.' 'Build!' echoed the trustees, taken aback by the cool manner in which this was said, 'why, now,' with a cunning smile, 'what *can* you put up dere, mit a Jews' burying-ground all around?' '*A surgeon's hall!*' said Mr. V——. 'You have made my property the most eligible in the city. Good morning!' The reader may imagine that Mr. V—— received his own price for the lots, which were speedily converted into a Golgotha; and the principal trustee now lies buried in the midst of them, with a white marble monument protruding out of his bosom, large enough to make a resurrection-man commit suicide."

Addison observes that in order that the resemblance in the ideas be wit, it is necessary that they should not lie too near one another in the nature of things. Thus, when a poet tells us that the bosom of his mistress is "as white as snow," we are not surprised by the comparison; but when he adds, with a sigh, that "it is as cold too," the observation becomes witty. The relation discovered between ideas,

in order to be wit, must be something remote from the ordinary haunts of thought, "the common tracks and sheep-walks made in the mind," — something not only individually but specifically new, and which implies subtlety and quickness in the mind that has detected it. There is nothing novel in the assertion that all men must die; but if one says that man is like an hour-glass, for both must ultimately run out and deliver up their dust, the attention is arrested by the relation pointed out between two ideas so dissimilar as a man and an hour-glass.

Thus far there is nothing in Sydney Smith's definition of wit which does not apply to an ingenious mechanical contrivance. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the pleasure we find in studying a new and ingenious piece of mechanism is closely analogous to that afforded by a stroke of wit. This would especially be the case if the machinery appeared to be impromptu, contrived at the moment, and not the result of premeditation. "There is a mode of teaching children geography by disjointed parts of a wooden map, which they fit together. I have no doubt that the child, in finding the kingdom or republic which fits into a great hole in the wooden sea, feels exactly the sensation of wit. Every one must remember that fitting the inviting projection of Crim Tartary into the Black Sea was one of the greatest delights of their (his) childhood; and almost all children are sure to scream with pleasure at the discovery."[1] It is evident from this that the definition of wit needs to be further qualified. A combination or relation of ideas, to be witty, must not only be unexpected and ingenious, but must be of such a nature as not to carry away the attention from the ingenuity displayed. Wit and humor are incompatible

[1] Sketches of Moral Philosophy, by Sydney Smith.

with important or solemn thoughts, and are swallowed up by nobler passions or deeper emotions. The sentiments that are awakened in the mind by the useful, the beautiful, or the sublime, unless they are very moderate in degree, are fatal to the feeling of wit, as anger or pity is to that of humor. This it is which prevents the *Lympha pudica Deum vidit et erubuit* (The modest water saw its God, and blushed) from being witty. So John Foster's saying about some elaborate worsted work, that "it was red with the blood of murdered time," would be witty, if it did not provoke too serious reflection. The famous epigram on Franklin, "*Eripuit fulmen cœlo sceptrumque tyrannis*," is not witty, because it excites admiration. So the letter of Franklin himself to his old friend Strahan, the London printer, is too solemn to be witty: —

Mr. Strahan, a member of Parliament, and one of that majority which has doomed my country to destruction:

You have begun to burn our towns and murder our people. Look upon your hands! They are stained with the blood of your relations! You and I were long friends: you are now my enemy, and I am Yours, B. FRANKLIN.

The same is true of the terse and terrible reply of Frederic the Great to the Jew banker, who, dreading subsidies and loans, prayed the king to allow him to travel for the benefit of his health: —

"Dear Ephraim, nothing but death shall part us."

Whenever a sentiment or observation contains strong sense or useful truth, the mind overlooks the surprising relation of the ideas involved, and notices only the wisdom of the precept. Coleridge's comparison of experience to the stern lights of a ship, which illumine only the track it has passed, is not witty, because of its wisdom. The same

may be said of the following lines from Greene's poem on the "Spleen." To cure this disease, some, he says, recommend bowling: —

> "Some hilly walks, — all exercise;
> *Fling but a stone, the giant dies.*"

So with Butler's lines: —

> "True as the dial to the sun,
> Though it be not shone upon."

Holmes's hydrostatic paradox of controversy trembles on the very verge of wit: —

> "You know that if you had a bent tube, one arm of which was the size of a pipe-stem, and the other big enough to hold the ocean, water would stand at the same height in one as in the other. Controversy equalizes fools and wise men in the same way, — and *the fools know it.*"

There is hardly any kind of intellectual effort that is oftener termed wit than that dexterous tampering with contrarieties and contradictions, while at the same time conveying shrewd sense or truth, which we call epigram. "It is like tantalizing a dog before giving him a bone." The forms and devices of epigrammatic surprise are innumerable. Contrary things expressed by words with similar sounds; dissimilarities of sound with sameness of sense; contradictions between the form of the language and the meaning conveyed; apparent irrelevance, as where Emerson says, "Where the snow falls, there is freedom;" felicitous comparisons that condense a deal of meaning into a few words, — all are of this class. In the following felicitous sayings we have truth in the guise of contradiction: "By indignities men come to dignities;" "Some persons are too foolish to commit folly;" "Verbosity is best cured by a wide vocabulary;" "I have no virtuous vices," said

Charles Lamb; "Nothing," says Canning, "is so fallacious as facts, except figures;" "The legendary age," says Grote, "was a past that never was present." We may add to these Sheridan's cutting sarcasm: "The gentleman is indebted to his imagination for his facts, and to his memory for his invention."

The effect of all these epigrams is to produce surprise; but only those of them can be called witty in which the attention is drawn chiefly to the ingenuity displayed, and only slightly to the truth conveyed. The man who said that "Neology is the visible horizon that bounds the outlook of the popular mind, and, as such, recedes as the popular mind advances," was not witty, but wise. "The protection which Britain affords to Ireland in the day of adversity," said an Irish orator, "is like that which the oak affords to the ignorant countryman who flies to it for shelter in the storm, — it draws down upon his head the lightning of heaven." This comparison, though very felicitous, is not witty, because the grave truth it is meant to convey predominates over our surprise at the ingenuity displayed. Samuel Bailey has well remarked that, were the ingenuity rendered in some way more prominent, the simile would have the effect of wit. "If, for example, an Englishman should boast of the shelter afforded to Ireland by the British oak, and an Irishman should retort: 'Aye, such shelter as the oak affords to the countryman in a storm, when it draws upon him the lightning of heaven!' this distribution of the matter, by enhancing the hearer's impression of the ingenuity displayed, although the ideas remained unaltered, would give to the comparison the character of wit."[1]

[1] Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 250.

There is a prevalent disposition to call any striking comparison wit, even when there is nothing of a mirth-provoking character in it. "The only *constant* effect that follows upon an original and striking comparison," says a writer in the "Westminster Review," "is a shock of agreeable surprise; it is as if a partition wall in our intellect was suddenly blown out: two things formerly strange to one another have flashed together. It is the feeling of any sudden violation or contradiction of use-and-wont, and has a sharp, pleasant, stimulating effect." But surprise, we have seen, is but one element of wit. Wit is rarely manifested in a pure state. In the great majority of cases it is combined with other comic qualities, which enhance its effect. It is, therefore, a kind of kaleidoscope of the mind, which alternately summons all the faculties — reason, observation, comparison, fancy, and imagination — to minister to its fantastical magic. Among the things which intensify the effect of wit, one of the most common and powerful is the union of the ludicrous with it, — an example of which we have in Sydney Smith's reference to a dinner supplied by New Zealand hospitality, at which, among other rarities, there would be "cold clergyman on the sideboard." To this we may add the same wit's classical portraiture of Lord Jeffrey: —

> "Witty as Horatius Flaccus,
> As great a Jacobin as Gracchus,
> Short, though not so fat, as Bacchus,
> Riding on a little jackass;"

and, again, the exquisitely comic description by the same writer of an ordinary clergyman, in which we have a union of the witty and the humorous with the ludicrous: —

"But substitute for him an average, ordinary, uninteresting clergyman, . . . striding over the stiles to church with a second-

rate wife, *dusty and deliquescent*, and four parochial children, *full of catechism and bread-and-butter;* or let him be seen in one of those *Shem-Ham-and-Japhet buggies made on Mount Ararat* soon after the subsidence of the waters, driving in the High Street, Edmonton, *among all his penurious, saponaceous, oleaginous parishioners.*"

We have a happy mixture of the witty and the ludicrous in the saying of Coleridge that "It was dark; it was pitchy dark, — so dark that even the cats ran against one another;" and, again, in the sarcasm of Curran, who said of a countryman of his at Cheltenham, who had a habit of lolling out his tongue, that he was doubtless trying to catch the English accent.

A common form of wit, combined with the ludicrous, is comic exaggeration. There are wits who love to pamper a joke into exaggeration, into a certain corpulence of facetiousness. This is especially the case with wits in company, whose three-piled hyperboles are built up one after another till "the overdone Babel topples and tumbles down amidst a merry confusion of tongues." We have a more delicate example of exaggeration in Praed's "Belle of the Ball-Room:" —

"And she was flattered, worshipped, bored;
  Her steps were watched, her dress was noted;
Her poodle-dog was quite adored;
  Her sayings were extremely quoted.
She laughed, and every heart was glad,
  As if the taxes were abolished;
She frowned, and every look was sad,
  As if the opera were demolished."

Falstaff was a great master of this kind of wit. Thus he tells the Lord Chief-Justice that he has lost his voice "with singing of *anthems;*" and he calls Bardolph's red nose "a

perpetual triumph, an everlasting bonfire-light," and says it has saved him a thousand marks in links and torches, walking with it "in the night betwixt tavern and tavern." On the other hand, he affirms that the sack which Bardolph had drunk would have bought him "lights as good cheap at the dearest chandler's in Europe. I have maintained that salamander of yours with fire any time this two and thirty years." How ludicrously he goes on heightening the account of his recruits at every step: "A mad fellow met me on the way and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies. No eye hath seen such scarecrows. . . . There 's but a shirt and a half in all my company; and the half shirt is two napkins tacked together and thrown over the shoulders like a herald's coat without sleeves."

The wit of Sydney Smith revelled in the most laughable extravagance of statement, — as when he pictured Isaac Hawkins Brown dining at the Court of Naples in a volcano coat with lava buttons; or when he said of that *maximus-minimus*, Jeffrey, that he had not body enough to cover his mind, that his intellect was indecently exposed. Some one mentioned to Smith, when he was in one of his exuberant moods, that a young Scotchman who had lately been near Combe Florey was about to marry an Irish widow, double his age and of considerable dimensions; upon which the wit-humorist exclaimed: —

"Going to marry her? Going to marry her? Impossible! You mean a part of her, — he could not marry her all himself. It would be a case, not of bigamy, but trigamy; the neighborhood or the magistrates should interfere. There is enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish. One man marry her! — it is monstrous. You might people a colony with her, or give an assembly with her, or perhaps take your morning's walk round

her, — always provided there were frequent resting-places, and you were in rude health. I once was rash enough to try walking round her before breakfast, but only got half-way, and gave it up exhausted. Or you might read the Riot Act and disperse her, — in short, you might do anything with her but marry her."

We need hardly say that the ludicrous may exist independently of wit, as wit may exist independently of it. Illustrations of the first part of this statement are furnished by the amusing blunders called "bulls," and by other unconscious trespasses against correctness or propriety. Almost every one is familiar with the story of the idiot who said that his simplicity was not his own fault; he was bright enough at birth, but his nurse exchanged him in infancy for another child that was a fool. Another example of such laughable absurdities is the story told of an Irishman, who, on seeing a stove-grate which, according to the owner, saved half the fuel burned in other stoves, declared that he would immediately have two of the same kind put up in his own house, and thus save the whole. Somewhat akin to this in absurdity is the inducement urged by the Italian landlord who was trying to persuade two travellers to lodge at his inn: "You shall have three beds."

Another ludicrous class of blunders are those of which Mrs. Slipsop in "Joseph Andrews," Smollett's Mrs. Tabitha Bramble, and Mrs. Malaprop in "The Rivals," furnish us with the most laughable examples. The attempts of ignorant or half-educated persons to use fine or sounding words, and their unconscious substitution of others having a wholly different meaning, are fruitful sources of the ludicrous. Mrs. Malaprop's "nice derangement of epitaphs" and "allegory on the banks of the Nile;" her sayings that she did not wish her daughter to be "a progeny of learn-

ing," but desired her to have "a supercilious knowledge of accounts," and to be acquainted with "the contagious countries," — are well-known examples of this. The celebrated Mrs. Rambottom, the cockney Continental traveller, who when at Rome heard persons "talking about a *knave* that had got into the great church built by Saint Peter, but did n't see no *suspicionary* person there," is another amusing example. The old lady who, sending for her doctor, told him that her blood seemed to have all *stackpoled;* the wife of the wealthy common-councilman in New York who when told by the principal of a fashionable school that her daughter was studious, and only wanted *capacity*, replied that her father was rich, and could afford to buy his daughter a "capacity," and she should have one immediately, cost what it might; the clergyman who announced to his congregation that he "would *supersede* the preaching of Christ in the evening with a talk on 'The Ideal Wife;'" the colored preacher who, after listening with his congregation to a learned white preacher's sermon, thanked the Lord in his prayer for "the manner in which the Gospel had been *dispensed with*" that evening; the doctor who, referring to a mysterious event, exclaimed, "The ways of Providence are *unscrupulous*," — all fall within this category. We may add here the bombastic lines of Dryden, published in 1674, in a rhymed tragedy, where he spoke of seraphs that —

> "unguarded leave the sky,
> And all dissolved in hallelujahs lie,"

a verse upon which a critic says: "I have heard of anchovies dissolved in sauce, but never before of *an angel dissolved in hallelujahs.*"

Again, the affectation of knowledge or of ability, resulting in the betrayal of ignorance or of dulness, is a legiti-

mate object of ridicule. The man who spoke of Hyde and Lord Clarendon as two different persons; the Scotch laird who advised his neighbor, when going to see the painters of Italy, to see also the glaziers of Switzerland; the ill-educated Irish lady who, anxious to avoid provincial pronunciation, asked, when some one had spoken of the *crater* of Mount Vesuvius, "What is the *creature* like?" — are examples of this form of the ridiculous.

Absence of mind is one of the most familiar, and often one of the most mirth-provoking, of ludicrous things. A man on his wedding-day becomes so absorbed in business or study as to forget the ceremony, and disappoints the bride; the members of a Highland funeral company stop midway in their walk to the churchyard, on discovering that in their ebriety they have forgotten to take the corpse.

Another circumstance that increases the effect of wit is its connection with praise or blame, exaltation or disparagement. Praise, as every one knows, is pleasing in proportion to the delicacy of the terms and the indirectness with which it is conveyed. Gross, fulsome adulation, broad, literal flattery, presupposes a greediness of admiration and a lack of discernment and delicacy of feeling in the person who is its unlucky victim. An indirect, ingeniously insinuated compliment, on the other hand, is gratifying, because, as one has happily said, it manifests a reluctance to wound that delicacy of feeling in you which it acknowledges, and yet a reluctance not able altogether to resist the admiration which forces itself to the lips. Again, direct praise exacts no ingenuity, while in indirect almost every degree of tact and skill may be displayed. An English gentleman once startled a nobleman by saying: "My lord, if the Scriptures are true, you will certainly be damned." When an explana-

tion was asked, the reply was: "Does not the Bible say, 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!'" When Garrick asked Rich, the manager, what sum Covent Garden Theatre would hold, the latter replied: "I could tell you to a shilling, if you would play Richard in it." If the compliment here covertly insinuated had been directly expressed, there would have been no wit in it.

Censure or disparagement has a still greater force in heightening the effect of wit, and as men are more disposed to criticise and blame than to praise, is oftener mingled with it. Rogers the poet, whose wit was sarcastic and acrid, gave as an excuse for the ill-natured things he uttered, that he could not otherwise get the ear of men. "I have a very weak voice," said he, in his slow, quiet, deliberate way; "if I did not say ill-natured things, no one would hear what I said." Some of Talleyrand's wittiest *mots* owe their pungency to their acidity; as when he said of a lady: "She is insupportable; but," added he, as if he had gone too far, and wished to make amends, "that is her only fault." When Madame de Staël drew a portrait of him as an elderly lady, in her novel of "Delphine," and of herself as the heroine, "They tell me," said Talleyrand, "that we are both of us in your novel, *disguised as women*." The readers of Swift will remember his biting comment on the motto of William III.: *Recepit, non rapuit*, — a motto intended to commend the way in which he obtained the British crown. "A very candid confession," said the satirist, "for all the world knows that the receiver is as bad as the thief." When censure is uttered in the form of a witticism, it is, like praise, most effective when the point lies in something implied, not expressed, — in an artful innuendo or a sly sarcasm. In such cases the inge-

nuity and dexterity exhibited enhance the pleasure given by the wit. Voltaire's mockeries are often conveyed by insinuation, as, when criticising the Song of Solomon, he says: "A Jew is not obliged to write like Virgil." Something like the effect of insinuated wit is that of the exclamation of the wife of a lord-lieutenant at a party given by Lady Palmerston: "O Nineveh! Nineveh! I shall never forgive you for discovering Layard." There is a repartee of Lord Chesterfield which is an example of this species of wit. He was once chosen, or volunteered, to conquer the repugnance of George II. to a certain appointment. On his producing the commission, and mentioning the name, the king angrily refused, and said: "*I would rather have the devil.*" "With all my heart," replied the earl; "I only beg leave to put your Majesty in mind that the commission is addressed to *our right trusty and well-beloved cousin.*"

The last illustration points to another circumstance that heightens the effect of wit, — namely, when it is elicited by something already said; or, as Dugald Stewart expresses it, when the original idea is started by one person, and the related idea by another. A witty retort is always more effective than an equally witty attack. The reason is, that, ingenuity being one of the elements of wit, anything that increases the hearer's sense of the ingenuity manifested, increases his impression of the wit uttered. As Quintilian says: "Sunt enim longe venustiora omnia in respondendo, quam in provocando." We shall discuss this part of our subject more at length in a future chapter on "Repartee," and pass, therefore, to another circumstance that enhances the effect of wit and humor; namely, the gravity of the occasion on which it is uttered. Shakspeare well understood this. Who has not noticed how much of their comic

effect the jests of the gravedigger in "Hamlet" owe to their apparent incongruity with his occupation? How much, again, is the wild wit of the Fool in "Lear" enhanced by the tragic pathos of the king? In "Macbeth" the brief interval between the murder of Duncan and the disclosure of it, is filled with that rudely comic passage of the drunken, half-sobered Porter, "to whose jocularity you pass from the high-wrought frenzy of Macbeth, reeking with his victim's blood, and from the yet more fearful atrocity of his wife, to return quickly to the tragic horror on the discovery of the murder; and in that transition, through a species of the comic, the harmony is preserved by the quaint allusions to hell and the vain equivocations to heaven." Dr. Johnson rightly commended tragi-comedy, as giving a true reflection of the grave and gay scenes which make up the web of life. Joy and grief, sadness and laughter, in this world, are never far apart. In the same street we see crape attached to the door of a house, while from a dwelling near by come the merry strains of the dance. A wedding-party returns from a church, and encounters a funeral procession winding its way to the same house. As the bullfinch sang to a French poet, as he sat in the shade of overhanging boughs: —

> "La Nature, au fond des siècles et des nuits,
> Accouplant Rabelais à Dante plein d'ennuis,
> Et l'Ugolin sinistre au Grandgousier difforme,
> Près de l'immense deuil montre le rire énorme."

In all the varieties of wit, and of humor too, alliteration adds a peculiar piquancy to the comic effect. Grattan uses this device with great frequency. Denouncing the British ministry, he says: "Their only means of government are the guinea and the gallows." Sydney Smith employs the

same trick of style with masterly skill and effect. Contrasting the position of the poor curates with that of the high dignitaries of the English Church, he calls the two classes "the Right Reverend Dives in the palace, and Lazarus in orders at the gate, *doctored by dogs, and comforted by crumbs.*" In the "Letters of Peter Plymley," ridiculing a measure of Perceval, the British premier, in a passage full of stinging irony, he exclaims: —

"Such a project is well worthy the statesman who would bring the French to reason by keeping them without rhubarb, and exhibit to mankind the awful spectacle of a nation deprived of neutral salts. This is not the dream of a wild apothecary indulging in his own opium, this is not the distempered fancy of a pounder of drugs delirious from smallness of profits, but it is the sober, deliberate, and systematic scheme of a man to whom the public safety is intrusted, and whose appointment is considered by many as a masterpiece of political sagacity. What a sublime thought, that no purge can now be taken between the Weser and the Garonne, that the bustling pestle is still, the canorous mortar mute, and the bowels of mankind locked up for fourteen degrees of latitude! When, I should be curious to know, were all the powers of crudity and flatulence fully explained to his Majesty's ministers? At what period was this great plan of *conquest and constipation* fully developed? In whose mind was the idea of destroying the *pride and the plasters* of France first engendered? Without castor-oil, they might for some months, to be sure, have carried on a lingering war; but can they do without bark? Will the people live under a Government where antimonial powders cannot be procured? Will they bear the loss of mercury? 'There's the rub.' Depend upon it, the absence of the *materia medica* will soon bring them to their senses, and *the cry of 'Bourbon and Bolus!' burst forth from the Baltic to the Mediterranean.*"

Among the most striking forms of wit are those which contain a double analogy, or double contrast in the ideas. These analogies, where the objects compared are shown to

agree or disagree, often show more ingenuity than single ones, and therefore produce a greater effect. We have an example of this in a caustic rebuke once given by Coleridge to some of his hearers at Bristol, when he was lecturing there. Some remarks of his of a democratic character provoked an outburst of disapproval, when, pausing for a moment in his lecture, he exclaimed, "I am not at all surprised that, when the red-hot prejudices of aristocrats are suddenly plunged into the cool element of reason, they should go off with a hiss."

Leigh Hunt, in characterizing the different forms of wit, begins with the simile and the metaphor. For bringing distant ideas into vivid contrast, there is nothing better than these figures. In Greene's poem on the "Spleen," from which we have already quoted, we have several happy examples of this, — as in the following allusion to the imposture practised at Naples in the exhibition of the pretended head of Saint Januarius, at which a phial full of congealed blood is made to liquefy. Speaking of beauty, the poet says: —

"Shine but on age, you melt its snow;
Again fires long extinguished glow,
And, charmed by witchery of eyes,
Blood, long congealèd, liquefies!
True miracle, and fairly done,
By heads which are adored while on."

In Swift's "Rhapsody on Poetry" there is a succession of witty similes. Addressing the poetasters of his day, he says: —

"Epithets you link
In gaping lines to fill a chink;
Like stepping-stones, to save a stride,
In streets where kennels are too wide;

Or, like a heel-piece, to support
A cripple with one foot too short.

. . . . . .

So geographers in Afric maps
With savage pictures fill their gaps;
And o'er uninhabitable downs
Place elephants for want of towns."

What can be more felicitous than Sheridan's description of Addington's ministry, which contained all Pitt's colleagues and subordinates under a new premier, as the fag-end of Pitt's, who had remained so long on the treasury bench that, like Nicias in the fable, "he left the sitting part of the man behind him"? Sydney Smith excels in odd, grotesque similes, — as when he says of the land-tortoise, that "the boa-constrictor swallows him whole, shell and all, and consumes him slowly in the interior, as the Court of Chancery does a great estate."

Praed's poems teem with witty similes, as in this from his "Portrait of a Lady:" —

"You'll be forgotten, — as old debts
By persons who are used to borrow;
Forgotten, — as the sun that sets,
When shines a new one on the morrow;
Forgotten, — like the luscious peach
That blessed the school-boy last September;
Forgotten, — like a maiden speech,
Which all men praise, but none remember."

Or in this, from the "Belle of the Ball:" —

"I think that love is like a play,
Where tears and smiles are blended;
Or like a faithless April day,
Whose shine with shower is ended;
Like Colnbrook pavement, rather rough;
Like trade, exposed to losses;
And like a Highland plaid, all stuff,
And very full of crosses."

Saxe, in his "Timely Verses," says of a very hot summer: —

> "E'en Stoics now are in the melting mood,
> And Vestal cheeks are most unseemly florid;
> The very zone that guards the frigid prude
> Is now intensely torrid."

The famous epigram made by Lord Chesterfield on seeing the full-length picture of Beau Nash between the busts of Pope and Newton, is a fine example of metaphorical wit: —

> "This picture, placed the busts between,
> Gives satire all its strength;
> Wisdom and Wit are little seen,
> But Folly at full length."

The effect of wit is sometimes produced by a writer's leaping at once to a conclusion, or leaving out intermediate ideas, in order to bring the two ends of a thought or circumstance together. Thus Horace Walpole called a fop who had a fine set of teeth, and was always grinning in order to show them, "the gentleman with *the foolish teeth.*" Addison excels in this kind of stenographic wit, examples of which we have in his papers on "Fans" and "Patches:"

> "There is scarce any emotion in the mind which does not produce a suitable agitation in the face: insomuch that if I only see the fan of a disciplined lady, I know very well whether she laughs, frowns, or blushes. I have seen a fan so very angry that it would have been dangerous for the absent lover who provoked it to have come within the wind of it; and at other times so very languishing that I have been glad, for the lady's sake, the lover was at a sufficient distance from it."

In the "Spectator's" day, ladies wore patches on their faces to enhance the whiteness of the skin; and at the same time they wore them so as to show, by the side on which they put them, whether they were Whigs or Tories: —

"Upon inquiry, I found that the body of Amazons on my right hand were Whigs, and those on my left Tories; and that those who had placed themselves in the middle boxes were a neutral party, whose faces had not yet declared themselves. . . . I must here take notice, that Rosalinda, a famous Whig partisan, has most unfortunately a very beautiful mole on the Tory part of her forehead, which, being very conspicuous, has occasioned many mistakes, and given an handle to her enemies to misrepresent her face, as though it had revolted from the Whig interest."

To conclude these observations on wit, — almost every strikingly sensible observation on folly is a witticism. Wit is thus often but the natural language of wisdom expressing itself in the tersest and most vivid form. Life is so full of startling contrasts that wit often consists merely in a vivid statement or juxtaposition of facts, — as when it is said that Russia is a despotism tempered by assassination; or when Voltaire declared that Penn's treaty with the Indians was the only one ever made between civilized men and savages that was not sanctioned by an oath, and the only one that ever was kept. So Macaulay says of Southey that "he has two faculties which were never, we believe, vouchsafed in a measure so copious to any human being, — the faculty of believing without a reason, and the faculty of hating without a provocation." Of Byron the same essayist says that the two great commandments of his system of ethics are, to hate your neighbor, and to love your neighbor's wife. In the same antithetical way, Macaulay declares that "society is constantly advancing in knowledge. The tail is now where the head was some generations ago. But the head and tail keep their distance."

To define "humor" is even more difficult than to define "wit." Being a matter of feeling as well as of intellect, it evades description. Though it has been a frequent and

fruitful subject for speculation and definition, it has always mocked at analysis. Like the butterfly in the hands of the naturalist, when once caught and fingered, all its beauty is gone, and nothing remains but a dull, colorless form, whose life and brilliancy have fled together. A recent English writer[1] goes so far as to acknowledge (and that, too, strange to say, at the very threshold of a book on "The American Humorists") his inability to discern any difference between wit and humor. "I have lain awake at night thinking over the difference," he says, "and have come to the conclusion that there is none." But though it is not easy to define either wit or humor with perfect precision, and thus to discriminate one from the other, as in the prismatic spectrum we cannot fix the precise line where one color ends and another begins, yet as we certainly know green from red, so can we, in the great majority of cases, distinguish a witty saying from a humorous one.

One great distinction between wit and humor is that wit is artificial and susceptible of culture, while humor is natural. The humorous man is born such; wit may be acquired. Wit is always conscious and personal; humor is generally unconscious and impersonal. The one is allied to the intellect; the other, to the imagination and the affections. The essence of wit is cleverness, sharpness, hawk-eyed mental cunning; the essence of humor is sensibility, "warm, tender fellow-feeling with all forms of existence." As the word originally signified, humor is "moisture,"—that is, the very juice of the mind, oozing from the brain, and fertilizing wherever it falls. Wit implies thought; humor, feeling. Wit is analytical, antagonistic, and destructive; it has often the sting as well as the honey of the bee:

[1] Rev. H. R. Haweis.

> "True wit is like the brilliant stone,
> Dug from the Indian mine,
> Which boasts two various powers in one, —
> To *cut*, as well as shine."

Humor, on the contrary, is genial, kindly, and sympathetic. The former often isolates itself, and watches like a spy in the corner; the latter mingles and fraternizes with men, and keeps them in good spirits. Wit laughs *at* men; humor laughs *with* them. The laughter which is provoked by Fielding's Parson Adams does not in the slightest degree lessen our respect for him. When he declares that he would willingly walk ten miles to fetch his sermon on Vanity, merely to convince Wilson of his utter contempt for that vice; and when he consoles himself for the loss of his Æschylus by suddenly recollecting that he could not read it if he had it, "because it is dark," — our merriment is devoid of all derision, and we love the good man only the more for his oddities and eccentricities. Humor makes us recognize even in bad men the same "mingled yarn" as in ourselves, and thus represses Pharisaic disdain and boast of sanctity. Gross and sensual as Falstaff is; though he is lazy, cynical, cowardly, treacherous, a thief and a liar, devoid equally of conscience, refinement, and spiritual apprehension, — yet we half love him, and cannot help pitying him when he lies on his sad bed, and calls out three times the name of God. Wit is enhanced by the seriousness of the speaker, by his mirth-provoking jests being uttered with an imperturbable, owl-like gravity of look and demeanor. Such was the expression of Swift, who, it is said, was never seen to laugh, even when uttering his most pungent sarcasms. On the other hand, much of the effect produced by the humorist is due to his contagious merriment as he laughs over his

own drolleries and merry conceits. Hence the error in the poet Thomson's characterization: —

> "Lively Wit excites to gay surprise;
> Or folly-painting Humor, grave himself,
> Calls Laughter forth, deep-shaking every nerve."

Wit, again, is thin, dry, saturnine, and is found in such persons as the spare, shrivelled, bloodless Voltaire, the poor, spectral, diaphanous Hood, and the pale, irritable, dwarfish Pope; but humor riots in ruddy physical health, in over-bubbling animal spirits, and is incarnated in Rabelais with his bounding sensuous life, Chaucer with his bodily health, and Christopher North with his athletic frame and exuberant animal energy. Wit makes us smile at its dexterity; but humor takes us by storm, and sweeps us away in a flood of merriment in which itself "reeks and riots." Wit is brief, concentrated, sudden, incisive. It is rapier-like, and sharpened to an edge and a point; it gives you a sharp, sudden electric shock, that tingles through the frame and is soon over. "You must be very much on the *qui vive* to see by its lightning, or you may find yourself in a similar predicament to that of the poor fly who turned about, after his head was off, to find it out." Not so with humor, which floods you with mirth that operates by a slower and more prolonged excitation of soul. Humor and pathos are twin-born: the humorist laughs through tears; but who ever knew such a thing as pathetic wit? Wit seizes on complex relations, and detects an unexpected analogy, or suggests a startling inference; humor, drawing its materials from situations and characteristics, is diffusive, and multiplies words. "Wit converges to a focus, like a lens; humor distorts, multiplies, and grotesquely colors, like a prism." It flits about like a will-o'-the-wisp, start-

ling us by its transitions. We have already remarked that wit is susceptible of culture, while humor is natural. Art and premeditation, which are favorable to wit, are fatal, or at least not favorable, to humor. Not only is it unattainable by effort, mocking and eluding pursuit, but even when it seems for a moment to be seized and held, it dies in the capture; its life, its charm, perishes in the grasp: —

> "And every touch that wooed its stay
> Has brushed its brightest hues away."

Finally, it may be remarked that wit is a later society birth than humor, which is doubtless almost as old as man.

Edwin P. Whipple has aptly said that Fuller's remark that a negro is "the image of God cut in ebony," is humorous; while Horace Smith's inversion of it, that the taskmaster is "the image of the devil cut in ivory," is witty. The reply of Cardinal de Retz's physician [1] when his patient in a severe illness complained that he felt "the tortures of hell," — "*Déjà?*" (already) is wit; and so is Sheridan's comparison, in the "Duenna," of the Jew who is hovering between Judaism and Christianity, to the blank leaf between the Old Testament and the New. On the other hand, the picturesque saying of Sydney Smith, that "when so showy a woman as Mrs. —— appears at a place, though there is no garrison within twelve miles, *the horizon is immediately clouded with majors;*" and his saying to the child who was stroking the shell of a turtle, in order "to please it," that "he might as well stroke the dome of St. Paul's, to please the Dean and Chapter below," — are humorous. So, again, Madame de Staël's criticism on the ontological systems of certain German thinkers, that "they had all the darkness which preceded the creation, without

[1] This is usually, but erroneously, attributed to Talleyrand.

the light which followed it;" and the Bishop of Asaph's suggestion, that the many insignificant names signed to a certain petition were like the zeros preceded by a decimal-point, "since however far the series may be prolonged, it can never rise to the value of a single unit," — were witty. Talleyrand, too, was witty when, in answer to the question, "Genève est ennuyeuse, n'est-ce pas?" he replied: "Surtout quand on s'y amuse;" and so was Rivarol when, on being told that the Archbishop of Toulouse had poisoned himself, he said: "He must have swallowed one of his own maxims." But when Chaucer describes the fox as seeking to capture the cock, and trying to flatter him into singing by telling him that he had

> "As merry a steven
> As any angel that is in heaven,"

and that his respected father used to sing "of heart all," and, to make his voice stronger, would exert himself so

> "That, with both his eyen
> He muste wink, so loud he woulde crien,
> And stood on his tiptoes therewithal,
> And stretchen forth his necke long and small;"

and when he thus tempts poor chanticleer to imitate his father and shut his own eyes also, upon which the cunning fox pounces on him and bears him off to the wood, — that is humor. It is true that wit and humor are, in a sense, made of the same stuff; but "so are a diamond and a lump of coal."

Humor has, to greater degree than wit, a flavor of character, being partly individual, and partly national in its peculiarities. As in passing from Germany to France, and from Champagne to Burgundy, or from Burgundy to Bordeaux, you find wines of different flavors, so in different

countries, and even in different parts of the same country, humor, "the intellectual wine of society," varies with the peoples by whom it is manifested. The humor of Burns differs from that of Béranger, that of Chaucer differs from Goldsmith's, and Goldsmith's humor from Sydney Smith's, as Johannisberg differs from Champagne, Champagne from Margaux, or Margaux from Chateau Yquem.

The principal source, or rather, perhaps, the very essence, of humor is incongruity, or the conjunction of things not usually connected. Horne Tooke's saying to his brother is full of humor: "You and I, my dear brother, have inverted one of the laws of Nature; for you have risen by your gravity, while I have fallen by my levity!" It was the incongruity between the pygmy body and the comparatively giant mind of the Abbé Galiani, — between "his lofty, sublime thoughts, worthy," as Sainte-Beuve says, "of Vico, if not of Plato," and the buffooneries, jests, and fooleries by which these thoughts were suddenly put to flight, so that, as he himself said, he was "two different men kneaded together, who, nevertheless, did not entirely occupy the room of one," that gave such a pungency to his humor. It is the juxtaposition of the important with the trivial that excites one's risibles when he reads the following extract from the diary of a matter-of-fact New England farmer. Under the head of "losses for the year," he chronicled these: —

"1. A wife, aged 42, — died suddenly of stoppage, Jan. 23.
2. The old rooster, — killed by a dog, March 4."

So with the following remarks by Mallet du Pan, which, intensely French as they are, are strikingly characteristic of "the grand nation," with whom the latest discovery in science and the fashion of a necktie are of equal moment:

"M. de Buffon prefers Milton to all other epic poets. *He has his hair curled with irons every day*, and at a less advanced age had it curled twice a day."

An intelligent writer observes that "it is the incongruity evident between the proclivity to universal philanthropy and to war in the character of Uncle Toby; to manliness and gullibility in Parson Adams; to simplicity and common-sense in Sir Roger de Coverley; to honesty and knavery in Gil Blas; to wisdom and folly in Don Quixote; to shrewdness and stupidity in Sancho Panza; and, it may be added, it is the opposition between the coarse materialism of the latter and the transcendentalism of the former,—which gives to these creations their peculiar power." In all humor there appears to be a principle of strong contrast, which leads a painter of manners to introduce his points of opposition as freely as an artist distributes his lights and shadows. The contrast between the Knight of La Mancha and his squire is as striking and picturesque as that between Dopple and Rosinante. The one is lean and tall, the other round and short; the one heroical and courteous, the other selfish and servile; the one full of high-flown fancies and romantic schemes, the other adhering to custom and tradition. In Don Quixote we have the spirit starving on sentiment; in Sancho, the flesh looking after its vulgar needs. The fat and mirthful Falstaff, with his exuberance of animal enjoyment and rotundity of form, has his foil in Justice Shallow, who is "like a man made after supper with a cheese-paring, and who, when he was naked, was for all the world like a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife." The knight has a still more exquisite foil in Silence, who "had been merry twice and once ere now." The effect of Falstaff's wit is yet further enhanced by the

contrast between his mental nimbleness and versatility and his physical grossness and awkwardness. How admirably is Sir Roger de Coverley's sense of his own importance in his own county contrasted with the silence and sensitive modesty of his friend the "Spectator;" and, again, in the portraitures of Will Wimble and Will Honeycomb, how finely are the simplicity and good-humored officiousness of the one set off by the graceful affectation and courtly pretension of the other! What a happy opposition, again, between the restlessness and speculative spirit of Mr. Shandy and the calmness and imperturbability of my Uncle Toby!

In the following passage from Sydney Smith's "Moral Philosophy" we have a happy illustration: —

"If a tradesman of a corpulent and respectable appearance, with habiliments somewhat ostentatious, were to slide down gently into the mud and dedecorate a pea-green coat, I am afraid we should all have the barbarity to laugh. If his hat and wig, like treacherous servants, were to desert their falling master, it certainly would not diminish our propensity to laugh; but if he were to fall into a violent passion, and abuse everybody about him, nobody could possibly resist the incongruity of a pea-green tradesman, very respectable, sitting in the mud and threatening all the passers-by with the effects of his wrath. Here every incident heightens the humor of the scene, — the gayety of his tunic, the general respectability of his appearance, the rills of muddy water which trickle down his cheeks, and the harmless violence of his rage! But if, instead of this, we were to observe a dustman falling into the mud, it would hardly attract any attention, because the opposition of ideas is so trifling, and the incongruity so slight."

The kinds of incongruity which are productive of humor are innumerable. Mental and moral incongruities; the inconsistencies and eccentricities of men; their hollow pretensions, affectations, pompous airs, and coxcombries, con-

trasted with their real characters, — are fruitful sources of the humorous. The most laughable of incongruities is that which arises from the clash of dignity and meanness, eminence and vulgarity, awe and familiarity. The pomp and circumstance of greatness are apt to be so accompanied with features of vulgarity that it is often impossible to regard them seriously. The faded beauty and the battered beau, the coward who makes loud pretensions to valor, the ambitious singer who has neither ear nor voice, are standing butts of laughter in every age. In the remonstrance of the lover to his mistress the humor lies in the juxtaposition of two opposite ideas: —

> "When late I attempted your pity to move,
> Why were you so deaf to my prayers?
> Perhaps you were right to dissemble your love,
> But why did you kick me downstairs?"

Rabelais left the following as his last will and testament: "I owe much; I have nothing; the remainder I give to the poor."

An anecdote is told of the late Scotch writer, Alexander Smith, which illustrates the mirth-provoking incongruities that occur sometimes in social life. When visiting Ambleside, he was introduced to Harriet Martineau, who, with a circle of ladies, was waiting to receive him; and he at once observed that "it had been a very fine day." Miss Martineau, who was somewhat deaf, was at once on the *qui vive:* the poet had made a remark that was, no doubt, instinct with genius, and worthy of the author of the "Life-Drama" and "Dreamthorp." "Would Mr. Smith be so good as to repeat what he had said?" Mr. Smith — looking, no doubt, uncommonly like a fool — repeated it in a somewhat higher key. Alas! the old lady shook her head;

it was really *so* annoying, but she did not quite catch it: would Mr. Smith *again* be so good?—and her hand was at her eager ear. The unhappy bard, feeling, in his distress, as he afterwards said, as if suicide might be the thing, shrieked and again shrieked his little piece of information, while symptoms of suppressed merriment were visible all around him. Finally, the old lady's ear-trumpet was produced, and proceeding to scream through this instrument, of which the delicate use was unknown to him, the bard nearly blew her head off; but she gained this time the information she had so ardently coveted. It would be difficult to name an incongruity more provocative of laughter than that between the loud tones of the literary lion and the high expectations of the listener, on the one hand, and the utterly trivial character of the remark thundered forth with such stentor-like energy, on the other.

In Johnson's Dictionary there are some striking examples of amusing incongruity; as, for example, in his definitions of "excise" and "pension," into which he has infused a degree of personal feeling and prejudice that ludicrously contrasts with the usually dispassionate tone of dictionaries. There is a similar incongruity in the spiteful examples of good and bad syntax in Cobbett's Grammar, and in the covert sneers conveyed by algebraic symbols, and the contempt insinuated through mathematical problems, in "The Elements of Algebra," written by the Confederate General Hill, and published just before the late Civil War. Another form of comic incongruity is the combination of literal and figurative forms of expression in a writer's style. Professor Henry Reed, in his "English Literature," quotes from a history of the two sieges of Vienna, by the Earl of Ellesmere, this sentence: "Inspired by the memory of former vic-

tories, . . . he flung his powerful frame into the saddle, and his great soul into the cause," — a juxtaposition of the literal and the metaphorical which was anticipated a century earlier in the panegyric of a chemical professor on the celebrated Robert Boyle, who was, he said, "a great man, — a very great man; he was the father of chemistry, and brother to the Earl of Cork." A hardly less ludicrous juxtaposition was that of the two clauses of a penny paper's motto: "The price of Liberty is eternal vigilance; the price of the Star is only one cent."

The effect of any incongruity which is productive of humor is greatly enhanced by association with what is solemn. An anecdote is told of a young man, who, on being informed by a messenger that his uncle lay at the point of death, threw aside everything and hurried precipitately to the bedside of his dying relative; but chancing to pass before a hat-store, said to himself, as a happy thought struck him: "See here, — I 'll just step in and have a bit of crape put on my hat. He 'll see then that I have thought of him!" When Charles Mathews, the actor, visiting the jail in Warwick, England, said that the "drop," at the place of execution, seemed small, — "To be sure," replied the jailer, "six 'ould be crowded, but foive 'ould hang very comfortable!" In a court of justice, during a church service, or in any very grave assembly, the most trivial incident that interferes with the solemnity of the proceedings excites laughter. Men in such places are wrought up to an extraordinary pitch of gravity, and the pettiest circumstance that is incongruous with the occasion, such as a loud snore, breaks it down instantly. It is hardly necessary to add that the drama depends largely upon incongruity or sudden contrast for its humorous as well as for its tragic effects.

The humor of the mock-heroic depends for its effect upon the association of the beautiful, the sublime, the solemn, or the pathetic, with that which is mean, ludicrous, or grotesque. An example of this kind of incongruity is the conclusion to Byron's sublime picture of a shipwreck:

> "They mourned for those who perished in the cutter,
> And also for the biscuits, casks, and butter."

Some years ago a writer, describing a certain person's physiognomy, said that "a few pensive lines about the nose showed that *snuff and sorrow* had been busy there." Here we have not only the incongruity of snuff and sorrow being associated together, but the additional incongruity between these in union and the mock-sentimental tone of the writing.

Though the essence of humor is incongruity, it is not true that every sort of incongruity has a comic effect. The incongruity which is a source of humor is that which excites surprise, and surprise *only*. There are many incongruities which cause pain, sadness, indignation, or disgust, — never laughter. Such are mirth at a funeral, a waltz in a church, a wolf in sheep's clothing, a weak old man carrying a heavy burden, Archimedes studying geometry during a siege. When Kent, in Shakspeare's "Lear," is found in the stocks, his old master exclaims with surprise: —

> "Ha!
> Mak'st thou this sport thy pastime?"

The incongruity between Kent's treatment and that which the king expected he would receive, though it astonishes Lear, does not provoke his merriment, but his indignation. So when Macbeth discovers that Birnam wood *does* come to Dunsinane hill in a way of which he had never dreamed,

and learns that Macduff had entered the world by the Cæsarean operation, he does not burst into laughter at the unexpected incongruity between these events and the Witches' assurances, but curses the tongue of his informant and the "juggling fiends" —

> "That palter with us in a double sense;
> That keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope."

To return to the man dressed in green, who fell into the mud (p. 42), — "suppose that, instead of a common, innocent tumble, he had experienced a very severe fall, and we discovered that he had broken a limb, our laughter is immediately extinguished, and converted into a lively feeling of compassion. The incongruity is precisely as great as it was before; but as it has excited another feeling not compatible with the ridiculous, all mixture of the humorous is at an end."

Humor in its higher forms, and in the degree that it associates itself with the sympathetic emotions, passes into poetry. Misanthropes and cynics — men who have little love for their fellow-men, and whose natural language is that of scorn and contempt — cannot be humorists, however largely endowed with wit. There is no humor in Ben Jonson, Pope, Butler, and Voltaire. There is no genuine humor, we think, in the gloomy, misanthropical Swift, though Carlyle thinks he had it, and "of no unloving sort, though cased in a most bitter and caustic rind." There is little humor, too, in Byron, in whom the most brilliant wit was united with the intensest egotism and the gloomiest misanthropy. On the other hand, Aristophanes, Chaucer, Shakspeare, Addison, Sterne, Scott, Burns, Cervantes, and Richter bubble over with humor; so does Dickens, who

has hardly a spark of wit. It is to humor that we are indebted for those matchless creations, Master Slender, Parson Adams, Uncle Toby, the Vicar of Wakefield, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Bob Acres, the Laird of Dumbiedikes, Dominie Sampson, Major Pendennis, Samuel Pickwick, Wilkins Micawber, M. Jourdain, and other similar types of individual, professional, intellectual, or moral oddity or absurdity. Don Quixote is a masterpiece of humor. The matchless skill of Cervantes is shown in the fact that, while he convulses us with laughter at the follies of knight-errantry, he never destroys our regard for what is good and worthy in it. Our feeling regarding it is totally different from that produced by the heartless mockeries of Voltaire.

Sir Roger de Coverley is a noble specimen of lambent, playful humor. Such a mixture of unpretending virtues and amiable weaknesses, of benevolence and simplicity, piety and superstition, with political and party prejudice, has never been depicted by any other humorist. Yet their blended effect is to make us both love and respect the hero, and, while smiling at his incongruous traits, to regard it as almost sacrilegious to laugh at him. In those exquisite creations of humor, Dogberry and Malvolio, we feel that he who imagined them had no scorn or ill-nature, no selfish feeling of superiority, in his heart when he drew them. So with Dominie Sampson: it is only a vulgar man who can laugh at him, and not feel at the same time a disposition to love him.

In whatever way we define wit and humor, it will be found that their limits are shadowy, and that they sometimes overlap each other. There are *jeux d'esprit* which are comic hybrids; it is impossible to class them as either strictly witty or humorous. When Fuller tells us of tall

men, that "when Nature builds two or three stories high she usually leaves the cockloft empty," how is this saying to be classed, — as wit, or humor? The same question may be asked regarding Plunket's reply to a testy and irritable judge, who threatened to fine him a hundred pounds if he did not stop coughing: "I'll give your lordship two hundred if you can stop it for me." In the following exquisite bit of poetic "chaff," addressed to those young ladies of the day who profess scholarship, there is delicious humor; but is there not sly wit also? At any rate, the piece is the very effervescence, the champagne foam of verse. It is written "*Ad Chloen, M. A.*," and appeared some years ago in the London "Owl": —

"Lady, very fair are you,
And your eyes are very blue,
And your hose;
And your brow is like the snow,
And the various things you know,
Goodness knows.

"And the rose-flush on your cheek,
And your algebra and Greek,
Perfect are;
And that loving, lustrous eye
Recognizes in the sky
Every star.

"You have pouting, piquant lips,
You can doubtless an eclipse
Calculate;
But for your cerulean hue,
I had certainly from you
Met my fate.

"If by an arrangement dual
I were Adams mixed with Whewell,
Then some day
I as wooer perhaps might come
To so sweet an *Artium*
Magistra."

There are men whose wit is sometimes tempered by humor, and there are others whose humor has not rarely a spice of wit; and sometimes we find both qualities conjoined, and each in large measure in one mind, as in Shakspeare, Fuller, Lamb, and Sydney Smith. This is, indeed, a most happy conjunction; for "wit is apt to be cold and thin-lipped and Mephistophelean in men who have no relish for humor, whose lungs do never crow like chanticleer at fun and drollery; and broad-faced, rollicking humor needs the refining influence of wit. When the two mental qualities are blended, the result is a kindly faculty which deals with its object as Izaak Walton advises his disciples to deal with the frog they use as bait, — running the hook neatly through the gills, and in so doing 'using him as though you loved him.'" The poet Collins beautifully sings of this union: —

"But who is she whom now she views,
In robe of wild contending hues?
Thou by the Passions nursed, I greet
The comic sock that binds thy feet!
O Humor, thou whose name is known
To Britain's favored isle alone;
Me, too, amidst thy band admit;
There where the young-eyed, healthful Wit
(Whose jewels in his crisped hair
Are placed each other's beams to share,
Whom no delights from thee divide),
In laughter loosed, attends thy side."

CHAPTER II.

THE USES OF WIT AND HUMOR.

Ridentem dicere verum
uid vetat? ut pueris olim dant crustula blandi
Doctores, elementa velint ut discere prima. — HORACE.

The perception of the ludicrous is a pledge of sanity. A rogue alive to the ludicrous is still convertible. If that sense is lost, his fellow-men can do little for him. — R. W. EMERSON.

The most utterly lost of all days is that on which you have not once laughed. — CHAMFORT.

WHAT would the world do without its wits? I am quite sure that it could contrive to exist without its epic poets. I doubt that it would go mad if no more treatises on metaphysics were ever written; and I am almost positive that it would still turn on its axis if every work on political economy should be burned up to-morrow. There are some of us who would not die broken-hearted if some convulsion should even destroy ninety-nine hundredths of all the disquisitions on theology. We think we should survive the loss of the American Encyclopædia in sixteen volumes, even with the Supplements; nor would our grief be inconsolable were we deprived by some awful disaster of all those "books which no gentleman's library should be without," including Josephus, Bancroft's "History of the United States," and the "Universal History of the World" by Monsieur Charles Rollin. Nay, we could almost bear up under the deprivation of Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy." But Aristophanes and Martial, Cervantes, Molière,

Shakspeare, Jean Paul, Fuller, Tom Hood, Lamb, and Sydney Smith, — what *would* life be without them? Abolish all their jokes, their epigrams and puns, their merry stories and rib-tickling conceits; make it penal to quote from them, or to steal and pass off their pleasantries as one's own; compel every man to manufacture his own "joes desperate," — nay, put him upon an allowance of one joke a month, — and who would not be ready to commit suicide? Who would go to a dinner-party, or sit through a literary chat at the club, or listen to the debates in Congress? Deprive the world of its wits! Abolish "Punch" and "Charivari," Abraham Lincoln, Bret Harte, and Charles Dudley Warner, and the funny column in the newspaper, and the "Editor's Drawer" of "Harper's Magazine!" Why, you might as well rob food of its flavor, and flowers of their perfume, take the ozone out of the atmosphere, or attempt to live in a refrigerator or in an exhausted receiver. Even the millennium, a late writer goes so far as to say, without Rabelais and Tom Jones and Tom Hood, would be to many persons what the hunting-grounds across the Styx would be to a Blackfoot Indian without his horse and his dogs, or Paradise without its houris to a Turk. They might contrive to spin out the thread of a sickly existence, but they would only live as frogs do when galvanized, or as turtles after their brains have been scooped out for microscopical analysis.

In distinguishing man from the other animals, scientists have noted three characteristics as possessed by him and by him only; namely, insanity, intemperance, and the faculty of laughter. Man is the only being, in the whole series, from the reptile from which, according to Mr. Darwin, he has been evolved, who goes mad, gets drunk, or shakes his

sides with merriment. Laughter is as peculiar to him as his chin and his *hippocampus major*. Of the first two of these distinctions he has little reason to be proud; in the last lies his glory. Animals, we are assured by high scientific authority, "have no sense of the ridiculous, and never laugh. They have no games, no toys, no pastimes, no amusements, though their young sometimes play and gambol." It is true the old zoölogists would have us believe that hyenas laugh, and the Ettrick Shepherd ascribes the same faculty to dogs. But though dogs and men have some faculties in common, — dogmatism, according to Douglas Jerrold, being only puppyism arrived at its growth, — we may doubt whether dogs have the sense of the ludicrous in the smallest degree. Man, the only animal that reasons, is the only animal that laughs, — and, we may add, the only one that is laughed at, or that deserves to be. Acting by instinct, the brute is never absurd or ridiculous, humanity having arrogated that privilege exclusively to itself.

Of all the mysteries of our mechanism, is there any more wonderful than this? That the only being who is conscious of the miseries of life should be the only one capable of laughing at them; that he who carries about with him the heaviest weight of woe, who is the victim of anxiety, disappointment, and care, the only being over whom the present hangs a fearful roof of leaden-colored skies, who looks forward to the future with forebodings, and to whom the past is a deplored dream; that this being, who finds himself in so solemn a position "between two eternities," and who is so often appalled by the consciousness of his responsibilities; who, as De Maistre says, weeps over others as over himself, who finds pleasure in weeping, and who even invents fictions to make himself weep, — should, of all beings,

have the power to laugh, and to become "a pendulum betwixt a smile and a tear," is surely a mystery most unfathomable. Here we see the loving-kindness of our Heavenly Father, — how He has set one thing over against another, giving us compensations for our miseries as we walk over the burning marl, "tempering the wind to the shorn lamb." He has not only set smiles against tears, and given us the oil of joy for mourning, but He has dispensed this dowry of enjoyment in exact proportion to the dowry of pain. We pity those delicately organized, sensitive beings, tremulous as the aspen-leaf, that thrill at the faintest breath of unkindness, to whom a harsh or censorious word is a dagger. We sigh when we think of the anguish they suffer, — how heavily the blows of Fate, unnoticed by the phlegmatic, pachydermatous man, fall upon their sensitive frames; how words which we should hardly notice, cut and cleave to the very marrow of their natures. But we forget their compensations, — that they have raptures proportional to their sufferings; that if they feel more keenly than others the thorns of life, they derive more exquisite delight from its roses; and that "trifles light as air" can wreathe their faces with smiles, as well as sully them with tears. Poor Hood sings: —

> "There 's not a string attuned to mirth,
> But has its chord in melancholy;"

but the converse is equally true.

That man has been endowed by Providence with the sense of the ridiculous for wise purposes, we cannot doubt. Every faculty of the human mind has its mission; and though, as Longfellow says, "Life is real, life is earnest," and a certain gravity of demeanor befits us in discharging its duties, yet there is a time to play as well as a time to

work, to laugh as well as to be serious; and we should greatly blunder if, in estimating the influences that sway society, we should not allow to the sense of the ludicrous a mighty power. For good or for evil, the cap-and-bells is an emblem of an authority as real, and often as potent, as the crown or the mitre, the sword or the gown. It can smooth the intercourse of life, light up the gloomy face with sunshine, keep vanity, affectation, and hypocrisy in check, and even exterminate dignities.

But leaving generalities, let me proceed to consider some of the uses of wit and humor. First, I may remark that one of their chief uses is to furnish a support and consolation under the trials, vexations, and disappointments of life. The toils and struggles of existence, which increase as we advance in years, the keenness of competition, the fierce haste in which men work, the intensity of our religious convictions as compared with those of other peoples, — all these and many other causes tend to render life to-day more sad than it was formerly, and sadder than the Creator of us all designed that it should be. If we cannot escape from the immediate pressure of care, anxiety, or pain, we may at least alleviate the sense of uneasiness by the magic of wit and humor, and cheat our misery of half its sting. It is, indeed, the most blessed office of these benign agents that they come to us in the hours of trial, vexation, and disappointment, and make us forget gloomy events and cankering cares; that they make even the oldest of us feel young again, and turn the ripples of our sorrow into ripples of laughter. Humor is of so divine a nature, so subtle a spirit, that it even penetrates into grief, and mixes itself with our tears. Even the Christian pilgrim's historian, grave old Bunyan, felt this, and says: —

"Some things are of that nature as to make
One's fancy chuckle, while his heart doth quake."

How often in the dreary fatigues of a campaign have the spirits of soldiers been kept up by some merry, light-hearted comrade, who has provoked a laugh at each occurring hardship or misery! It was one of the most striking characteristics of Charles James Napier, the hero of Scinde, that he found in humor a constant antidote to all the ills and vexations of life. If he was wounded, his spleen discharged itself in a jest; if he was hurt or annoyed, the spirit of mockery burst into an uproar of merriment. "Nonsense will come," he once wrote to his mother, "and devil take me if I can stop for the life of me. . . . *What a great relief is nonsense to a man who has been working hard!* I have a *quantum* in me beyond the ordinary run of men; and if it had no vent, my death would ensue from undelivered jokes. I am delighted to hear that you are so well, dearest mother, and that you bore the comet like an angel. By the way, no doubt exists in my mind that comets are the souls of good post-horses, who still ply their trade, carrying angels charged with despatches." Is not this wise fooling? Is it surprising that a hero with such a spirit, though it was enclosed in a slender frame, triumphed over the cholera in its most malignant form, and elaborated a magnificent strategic combination "under a heat which mortal cannot face?"

If variety is "the spice of life," it may be said that wit and humor are the salt of it. Indeed, we have Cicero's authority for this, for, speaking of those jests which, as Bacon says, "serve to be interlaced in continued speech," he calls a jest-book a *salt-pit*, out of which you may extract salt to sprinkle where you will. As we cannot sus-

tain physical life without salt, so neither can we sustain social life without wit and humor, which are not only its salt, but also the most pungent of the spices which season its variety. What a perennial source of freshness and joy is wit to the mind! When devoid of malice, it is like the wine of Paradise, which, as Moslem doctors aver, exhilarates without the danger of reaction. So with humor: how it clears away the cobwebs from the brain, and keeps the wrinkles from the face! How it flows through the whole being, like a bubbling stream with perpetual verdure upon its banks! Without it, we are dry and parched, — "hot simooms or arid plains." What can be more dull and monotonous than a day spent in business or study, unrelieved by a solitary jest! "We may well be refreshed," says good Jeremy Taylor, "by a clean and brisk discourse, as by the air of Campanian wines, and our faces and our heads may well be anointed and look pleasant with wit, as with the fat of the balsam-tree."

Again, the merriment which wit and humor create is a potent help in the discharge of our physical functions. Æsculapius wrote comic songs to promote circulation in his patients. The celebrated English physician, Dr. Sydenham, declared that the arrival of a merry-andrew in a village was worth more than that of twenty asses loaded with medicines. It is said that another London physician used to write under his prescriptions, "Item, read three or four pages of 'Peregrine Pickle.'" Men who make others laugh are physicians without saddle-bags and drugs, and the medical colleges might do worse than make them professors. Professor Hufeland, of Berlin, used to declare that laughter was one of the greatest helps to digestion with which he was acquainted, and that the

custom prevalent in the Middle Ages of exciting it at table by the jokes and puns of jesters and buffoons, was founded on true medical principles. The kings and princes who thus seasoned their meals enjoyed, no doubt, a better digestion than Darius, the Persian king, who was greeted daily at dinner by his cupbearer with the solemn injunction: "Lord, remember the Athenians!" "Endeavor," says Professor Hufeland, in his celebrated work on the "Art of Prolonging Life," "to have cheerful and merry companions at your meals; the nourishment one receives amid jollity and mirth will certainly produce good and light blood." It is, no doubt, to the increase of nervous stimulus which pleasing emotions produce in the stomach as well as in the whole muscular and secretory systems, that the effect here mentioned is due. Cheerfulness, a sunny disposition that laughs at care, it is well known, conduces to health both of body and mind; it is one of the great physicians of Nature. "L' allegrezza nutrisce la vita."

> "Il y a trois médecins qui ne se trompent pas, —
> La gaieté, le doux exercise, et le modeste repas."

A charming English writer has hardly exaggerated in saying that there is an ethereal quality in wit which embalms the faculties and prevents decay. The true humorist has, in fact, discovered that *elixir vitæ* which the Alchemist sought for, and prized more than gold. Who can think of Fuller, Fielding, Goldsmith, or Thackeray as growing old, or associate wrinkles and gray hair with Sydney Smith or Charles Lamb? "Carlagnulus," as his friends lovingly called the latter, was always young; in spite of his one great sorrow, he was ever elastic, — a boy in a man's coat. The animal spirits of Sydney Smith never flagged. Humor was the very sap of his brain, —

the magic quality by which he cheated poverty of its sting, and misfortune of its bitterness. Was his steed ugly, and did he sometimes throw his rider "into the next parish"? He called him "Calamity," or "Peter the Cruel," and was thankful that he was not thrown into a neighboring planet. Was his coach ancient, crazy, and lumbering? He added to it, yearly, a new wheel or a new spring, and mentally joined in the fun when the boys cheered it and the village dogs barked at it. Was he too poor to have a herd of deer? He fastened antlers on donkeys, and drew tears of laughter from aristocratic visitors. Age frosted his hair, but never chilled his heart; he was as buoyant in his last days as when, a poor, struggling curate at Foston-le-Clay, he cracked his jokes over his poverty, cheered his neighbors, and drew up the blinds and opened the window of his little parlor, on fine mornings, "to glorify the room" with sunshine.

It has been justly said that it is for thoughtful minds that the agency of wit and humor is most needed, for it is such minds that are most liable to morbid moods, — to ennui, to despondency, to discontent, which are more paralyzing to the energies of the mind than danger or earnest labor, for these nerve the spirit to encounter them. It is a striking fact that in Italian *un tristo* signifies not only a sad, but also a dangerous character. What a blessing would a keen sense of the ludicrous have been to that profound, but gloomy thinker, John Foster! The leading feature of his mind was intense earnestness, produced by a vivid, powerful, and sometimes morbid imagination, which clothed certain subjects, on which his mind brooded too exclusively, with an awful grandeur and a stern solemnity. While he was not wholly devoid of a

sense of the comic, he did not have enough of it to lighten the pressure which a vivid feeling of the ills of life, moral and social, continually imposed upon his spirit; and the result was that at one period of his life his reason gave way. Among the peoples of the earth it is the Anglo-Saxon race, with its comparatively gloomy temperament, its intense activity and tendency to overwork, and its anxiety about the future, that most needs the restorative and refreshing influence of the two benign faculties we have commended. "They took their pleasures sadly, after their fashion," says Froissart of the Anglo-Saxons of his own time; and to-day ennui, world-weariness, sadness of soul and countenance, doubts "if the play be worth the candle," impatience, and restlessness too often characterize even the most successful of their descendants on both sides of the Atlantic. Dr. John Brown tells of a countryman of his who, being asked to account for the gravity of his dog, replied: "Oh, sir, he can just never get eneugh o' fechtin'!" A spirit like that of this saddened dog seems to-day to characterize many Americans. Like Izaak Walton's neighbor, we are "too busy to laugh." Wealth, ingenuity, worldly wisdom, and popular information abound among us; but our social salad lacks the oil of joy. As Shelley sings: —

> "We look before and after,
> And pine for what is not;
> Our sincerest laughter
> With some pain is fraught;
> Our sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought."

In this closing quarter of the nineteenth century, pregnant with many cares, and heavy with questions that it cannot answer; when competition is keen, and men live and work at high pressure; when the stress and intensity

of life age a man before his time; when so many of the noblest break down in harness hardly half way to the goal, — the beneficent agency of wit and humor is specially needed. The life of our day is so often lived at fever-heat, is so swift and restless, that the wear and tear are enormous. The increasing use of the railway and the telegraph, the invention of the telephone, and the multiplication of mechanical arts, crowd our days with activities, excitements, and anxieties of which our fathers knew nothing. Our modern means of transit, and of sending and receiving intelligence, with the extraordinary power they give us of utilizing every moment of our time, are revolutionizing our lives. Our modern life is the life of the whole world. The concerns of the other hemisphere are ours, and events a thousand miles away agitate and thrill us like those of our own neighborhood. The tick of the clock at the Antipodes is audible throughout the diameter of the globe, and if a storm blow along the slopes of the Himalayas, it instantly disturbs our barometer. If there is an inundation of the Nile, a fire in Berlin, an outbreak of cholera in Italy or Spain, a seizure of the Philippine Islands by Germany, a defeat of the Servians in Bulgaria, an assassination of a sultan in Turkey, a battle in Burmah or in Tonquin, we are almost instantly made spectators of it by the electric messenger that flies over a hemisphere while we are putting on our glasses. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that every man actively engaged in the world's business is a microcosm. The world's pulse beats within him, and he is sensitive to its throbbings; he burns with its feverishness, and faints with its languor. It is this which constitutes the stress of modern existence, exhaust-

ing so rapidly human life, wearing it out with the pains and penalties of a civilization which is as heedless of mortal weakness as the machine that catches its inventor in iron tails and crushes him to atoms. In such an age the need not only of bodily rest, but of recreation, of some amusement that shall divert and relieve the mind, is evident; and what better antidote to melancholy and "low-thoughted care" can be provided than that which wit and humor — those safety-valves of concentrative minds — so happily supply? The prophetic words which the hypochondriac, Thümmel, heard while ascending laboriously the stairs of Strasburg cathedral are applicable to all sufferers from nervous exhaustion: "Only a hearty laugh can cure you." It is, indeed, one of the greatest blessings of humor that it tends to keep men in good spirits, and therefore young. It is the handmaid of health; it is the safety-valve through which all the noxious vapors that might poison the mind find escape in an explosion of merriment.

Another of the useful offices of wit is to scourge those reprobates who are insensible to ordinary moral denunciation. The delight of the good and wise, wit is the merciless scourge of knaves and fools. There are pachydermatous offenders against morality, coarse-minded, thick-skinned knaves, who defy all serious remonstrance, and can be pierced only by the scalpel of the satirist. Indifferent to the denunciations of the pulpit, and mocking at courts of justice, they are keenly sensitive to the shafts of ridicule. An old English poet says: —

> "He who does not tremble at the sword,
> Who quails not with his head upon the block,
> Turn but a jest against him, loses heart.

The shafts of wit slip through the stoutest mail;
There is no man alive that can live down
The inextinguishable laughter of mankind."

Crises are continually occurring in society when it can be delivered from peril only by the Damascus blade of the wit. Bad actions which all men condemn in theory, though society may still condone or exact them; acts of wickedness whose very daring secures for them exceptional impunity; all those polite, fashionable delinquencies that shelter themselves under the garb of decency, and that flourish most rankly at the most advanced periods of civilization, — against these it is that the wit and the humorist hurl their shafts, and society hails with delight its deliverer. The satirist of true genius may be considered as a supplement to the legislative and to the judicial authority of his country, supplying their unavoidable defects, and striking terror where even the divine prohibitions are held in contempt.

There are times in the history of society when it seems to be honeycombed with falsehood; times when it is full of lies, — lies of which oral falsehoods form but a small part. "There are lies," it has been said, "of custom, and lies of fashion; lies of padding, and lies of whalebone; lies of first water in diamonds of paste, and unblushing blushes of lies to which a shower would give quite a different complexion; the politician's lies, who, like a circus-rider, strides two horses at once; the coquette's lies, who, like a professor of legerdemain, keeps six plates dancing at a time; lies sandwiched between bargains; lies in livery behind republican coaches, in all the pomp of gold bands and buttons; lies of red-tape and sealing-wax; lies from the cannon's mouth; lies in the name of glorious principles, that might make dead heroes clatter in their graves;

Malakoffs of lies, standing upon sacred dust, and lifting their audacious pinnacles in the light of Heaven!" Against all these multiform mendacities, over all the surgings and heavings of falsehood, unreality, and sham, of impudence, hypocrisy, and cant, the scornful laughter of the humorist is heard as he penetrates beneath all masks, and detects the falsehood in spite of its disguises.

What moralist in old Rome did so much to repress the vulgar insolence of newly acquired wealth, the airs and pomposity of the parvenu, as Horace when he bade the upstart Menas — the ex-slave, who, though risen to be a military tribune, bore still on his back marks of the Spanish cat-o'-nine-tails, and had legs lacerated by fetters — to take note, as he strutted along the Holy Way, or

> "with his nags
> Wore out the Appian highway's flags,"

how the faces of the passers to and fro expressed a measureless indignation? What serious writer has so effectually exploded the notion prevalent among his countrymen, and not yet extinct elsewhere, that poetry is "a fine frenzy" only, requiring neither meditation nor good sense, — that to obtain the name and recompense of a poet one has only to shun all baths, stop trimming his nails, and withhold from the barber "a head not to be cured by the produce of three Anticyras"? What laws have done so much to repress gambling as the indignant sarcasms of Juvenal against those who staked their entire livelihood, all their family estates and ancient heirlooms, on the fall of the dice, though they grudged the cost of a cloak to their slave who was shivering in the cold? Who can doubt, again, that the brilliant and sparkling satirist of the "Dunciad,"

the "little wasp of Twickenham," vengeful and venomous as he was, did more to provoke a feeling of revolt and contempt against the vices of his time than all the dictates of morality or the denunciations of the pulpit?

> "I own I 'm proud — I must be proud — to see
> Men not afraid of God afraid of me," —

was the daring boast of Alexander Pope in an age of corruption, peculation, and deceit, when baseness was a stepping-stone to power, and "hypocrisy distributed the spoils of fraud." How many a would-be gentleman of our day, tickled with vanity and inclined to vulgar ostentation, has been impelled by the stinging irony of Thackeray to avoid "the sorrows of gentility," and, by living inside of his income, to keep out of the "Book of Snobs"? How was it that duelling was suppressed? In vain did the pulpit thunder and the press denounce this fashionable form of murder. It was only when "the code of honor," which in France had defied even the power of a Richelieu to repress it, was made the butt of ridicule, that Christian men ceased to make their bodies targets for the bullets of any bully who chose to consider himself aggrieved, or whom a craven fear of public opinion impelled to send a challenge.

There are persons who dislike satire because they confound the satirist with the common libeller. They cannot discriminate between the literary vitriol-thrower, who seeks only to gratify his malice, and the satirical poet or prose-writer, who ridicules vice or folly to shame men out of, or to deter them from, its practice. The true satirist has a nobler end than to gratify his personal pique. The great lessons he teaches are, that on a lie nothing can be built; that tinsel can never be made to pass for gold; that the

victim of wrong suffers less than the wrong-doer; and that man has a soul which cannot be fed on meats and drinks, fine palaces and millions of money. It is in no spirit of bitterness that the humorist laughs when he sees the hypocrisies, inconsistencies, and trickeries of men, — when he beholds inflated bankruptcy rolling along in its coach-and-four, and fancying that protested bills and sleek sealskin lies will always escape detection. He knows that, with all his cunning, and even when seemingly most successful, the rogue outwits and overreaches himself, — that, as Coleridge says, a knave is a roundabout fool, a fool in circumbendibus.

The true humorist is no scandal-monger, no heel-biter, no cynic, who, having failed of happiness himself, is bent on making everybody else miserable. He is no mocking goblin that sits at the elbow of men to chill their enthusiasm, to prick all the bubbles of the ideal with the needle-point of ridicule, to give imagination the lie, to tell eloquence that it is bombast, and poetry that it is "such stuff as dreams are made of;" but he is, as Thackeray calls him, "a week-day preacher," a genial and benevolent reformer, who by his ludicrous exposures of folly would cheat men into wisdom. He pities while he smiles at the endless shifts and pitiful make-believes by which the poor man tries to hide his poverty. He knows that there is nothing in poverty itself which should "make men ridiculous;" that it is the pretension not made good, the attempt at deception, that points the satire against poverty; that if the man is not ashamed of his poverty, there is no jest. Among the companions of Sir Joshua Reynolds when he was studying his art in Rome was a fellow-pupil of the name of Astley. They made an excursion with some

others on a sultry day, and all except Astley took off their coats. After several taunts he was persuaded to do the same, and displayed on the back of his waistcoat a foaming waterfall. Poverty had compelled him to patch his clothes with one of his own landscapes. It was his reluctance to betray the shortcomings of his wardrobe that made him ridiculous; though that reluctance may have been due, not to false pride, but to a sense of decorum.

Wit is the enemy of all excess; "the unco gude," the over-righteous, are everywhere open to its attacks. It is the mortal foe of trickery and deception of every kind; it exposes the duplicity of the demagogue, who, having secured his election to office by bribery and caucus-packing, thanks his fellow-citizens for their "unbiassed suffrages;" and it takes you into the chamber of a beau, whose killing graces have just won tender glances from Chloes and Belindas without number, and shows you his false teeth, hair, and eye, his padding, and his stays. Wonderful indeed is the detective power of this mischievous elf, penetrating, as it does, through the most plausible pretences, the most brilliant but shallow patriotisms, — exposing "well-dressed shams in top-boots," or flashing upon a rogue and lighting up his lineaments like a policeman's lantern. Egotism, vanity, and pomposity of all kinds, the offspring of self-ignorance, are frequent targets of wit. "A man," it has been truly said, "is ridiculous not so much for what he is, as for pretending to be what he is not." The rarest thing in the world is to see a frank knave, or a blockhead who knows himself. How few persons, on seeing a great painting, or visiting sublime scenery that is world-renowned, dare frankly and honestly to acknowledge how it impresses them! How many parrot the stereotyped, effete expressions

of guide-books or fashionable friends, in uttering the emotions of admiration or wonder which on such occasions they think they ought to feel! It was a sentimental lady of this kind with whom he was walking on the beach at Newport that Dr. Channing once quietly and gently rebuked. "When I look at the sweep of the ocean and its power," said she, "and think of the infinite range beyond, I feel myself so small as to be all insignificant. Do not you?" "My dear friend," replied the doctor, "when I look at the infinite ocean I do not think of myself at all."

One of the most effective ways in which humor will make pretension ridiculous is by linking it with facts which the "swell" would fain forget. It will put the carriage in which he rolls along with liveried driver, into the same picture with the wheelbarrow with which he earned his first money. It will picture the averted eyes and shrugs of the shoulders with which he passes by his old cronies in homespun, and bring before us the vulgarities of manner and speech which hold him back whenever he tries to overleap the gulf that yawns between him and respectability. It will put *Quid rides* on the panel of the wealthy tobacconist's carriage, and portray a hog on that of the rich Cincinnati snob, who has passed from "the stick-'ems" to "the stuck-'ems." It was a felicitous stroke of humor when Philip Thicknesse, father of Lord Audley, rebuked his son's ingratitude by exposing his plebeian origin. Having applied to his son for assistance, which was denied, he immediately hired a cobbler's stall directly opposite his lordship's house, and put up a signboard, on which was inscribed in large letters: "Boots and shoes mended in the best and cheapest manner by Philip Thick-

nesse, father of Lord Audley," — which brought the needed help very speedily.

Who is ignorant of the wondrous power of wit and humor in the political world? Pleasant when it sparkles at the dinner-table, wit is terrible when it exposes political shams; when it shows the folly of antiquated prejudice, and the absurdity of time-honored dogmas; when it makes oppression contemptible, persecution laughable, and tyranny ridiculous. Strange paradox! wit, the very faculty that heightens the flavor of your claret, and gives an indescribable charm to social intercourse, has been known to make despots quake with terror, to change the resolutions of tyrants, and even to shake thrones and dynasties. Tyrannies whose iron heel had nearly crushed out the life of the people; tyrannies which neither respected man nor feared God, and which had mocked at all attempts to throw off their yoke, — have been blasted by the lightnings of ridicule, and changed from objects of terror and hate into targets of contempt and scorn. Who has forgotten how a pope who had again and again defied an emperor was tortured by pasquinades stuck up in the streets and on the church door?

Wit unmasks the hypocrisies and selfishness which are veiled by political shibboleths and catchwords. The toast "Church and King," Dr. Parr said, usually meant "a church without a gospel, and a king above the law." Sydney Smith, speaking of the cry of "God save the King!" uttered by men in power in the early part of the century, says: "I am delighted to hear it when it is the cry of genuine affection; . . . but 'God save the King!' in these times, too often means: 'God save my pension and my place; God give my sisters an allowance

out of the privy purse; make me clerk of the irons; let me survey the meltings; let me live upon the fruits of other men's industry, and fatten upon the plunder of the public!'"

It is hardly too much to say that in every civilized country — certainly in every free country — on the globe, wit, in the form of satire, has had a share in the legislation and policy of the Government. How many political events in France has a *bon mot* heralded; of how many has it been the cause? Never was there a Government in that country that did not turn pale at a caricature, shudder at a political song, or tremble at an epigram. Henry IV. reigned by *bons mots;* and Chamfort characterizes "the old *régime*" as "an absolute monarchy tempered by epigrams." A series of *bons mots*, begun by Voltaire, continued by Diderot, and systematized by Helvetius, destroyed the ancient religion, sapped the foundations of the throne, and changed the destinies of the monarchy which Louis XIV. fancied he had fixed for centuries. Voltaire did not argue, yet did more to undermine the institutions of Europe than all its philosophers and logicians. Knowing that few can reason, while all can laugh; that logic, if understood, is soon forgotten, while wit is both relished and remembered, — he employed *jeux d'esprit* instead of syllogisms, and they "crackled up and down the world like fire."

When France was on the eve of the Revolution, the "Mariage de Figaro" of Beaumarchais, full of the most biting and insolent revolutionary sarcasm, ran night after night on the Paris stage. "What has he done for his fortune?" asks some one of a noble, in the play. "He took the trouble of being born," is the reply. Notwith-

standing the efficacy of that terrible political engine, the guillotine, Chamfort, who had the best opportunities for observation, declared that "Il n'y a rien qui tue comme un ridicule." Lord Dalling observes that no other enemies were so fatal to the restoration of the Bourbons as Béranger's "Le Nain Jaune" and the "Tablettes Politiques." It was not his more serious and elevated odes, kindling the spirit of liberty, that were most dangerous to the Bourbons; it was the light, satiric songs, which, wounding the vanity of the nation, inspired its hatred for its bigoted and impotent rulers. Who can wonder that the pseudo-republican, cynical, and selfish Napoleon could not endure wit, "that eternal sceptic," as Lanfrey terms it, "the born enemy of false grandeur, the foe of charlatanism"? Is it strange that the "nephew of my uncle" was more sensitive to political squibs than to conspiracies?

A history of England would be incomplete that did not give some space to the wits and satirists of that country and their influence upon its politics and religion. Time was when the wits of England were the lords or lions of its society, and a satirical poem of a few lines might ruin a politician, extinguish an author, or overthrow a ministry. The scathing irony in the dedication to Cromwell of "Killing no Murder" made even the Lord Protector tremble, and move about in fear for his life. The author of the ballad of "Lilliburlero" boasted that he had rhymed James II. out of his dominions. The small-shot which Fox and Sheridan, Pitt and Canning, fired off in the "Rolliad" and "Anti-Jacobin" proved hardly less murderous to their political enemies than the bombs and shells which they let loose in the House of Commons. More than one Prime Minister of England, and at least one President of

the United States, has owed his influence as much to his jokes as to his policy; while others, like Addington, — of whom Canning once said that "he was like the small-pox, since everybody must have him once in his life," — have been driven from office by a nickname. Who can estimate the social and political power of "Punch" in Great Britain? How many British statesmen have been restrained from the perpetration of folly or injustice by the fear of being pointed at by the scoffing finger of that caustic satirist, and made the laughing-stock of the world!

There have been occasions when jests dropped carelessly from royal lips have plunged kingdoms into war, and led to enormous expenditures of treasure and blood. The biting sarcasms of Frederic the Great on Madame de Pompadour, Count Bruhl and the Empress of Russia, contributed not a little to bring down upon his dominions the armies of Russia, Saxony, and France. The sneers of Canning at the American navy in 1812 provoked the ire of the American people almost as much as the impressment of their seamen, and deeply embittered that contest, in which, as Lord Dalling says, the English "were so insolent and so unsuccessful." But we need not cross the Atlantic for illustrations. Who has forgotten the powerful aid rendered to the North in our late Civil War by "Petroleum V. Nasby," of the "Confederate Cross-Roads"? Though he assumed the cap-and-bells, Lincoln and Grant were not more terribly in earnest. Secretary Boutwell publicly attributed the overthrow of the rebels to three great forces, of which he named as one the satire of Nasby. He might have added a fourth, — the scathing caricatures of Nast. Pictorial wit — humor addressed to the eye — has become one of the most galling weapons of political warfare. It sticks in the mem-

ory like a barbed arrow, and exasperates even more than the wit of words. The fate of a public man or measure has been sealed again and again by a masterly caricature in "Punch" or "Charivari." Of all the attacks of his enemies, there was none that made the waspish author of the "Dunciad" shiver more with fear than a caricature by Hogarth. Regarding it as the most grievous insult of his life, he yet did not dare to resent it, "the spiteful pencil proving more than master of the poisoned pen."

How invaluable is humor to a politician! It is difficult to say whether it is more useful as a preservative from absurdity, or as a means of preventing the dull and weary monotony of hard work from becoming unendurable. It was Lord Palmerston's quick and keen sense of humor that both minimized his fatigue and saved him from taking, or at least from long maintaining, an attitude that could be ridiculed. It was Disraeli's lack of the same quality that made him so often a butt of laughter. Though abounding in wit, and that of the most stinging kind, and a master of epigrammatic invective, he had only the slightest sense of humor, and saw nothing absurd in a situation which to other persons was exquisitely ridiculous. What an advantage it would have been to Burke, if his sense of the ridiculous had been proportional to his other gifts! His invective would then not have abounded in those grossly offensive comparisons which so often disgusted his hearers and provoked a reaction in favor of its victim. His speeches would have delighted us with more such passages as that in which he characterizes the noisy English sympathizers with the French Revolution: —

"Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, while thousands of great

cattle, reposing beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only tenants of the field; that of course they are many in number; or that, after all, they are other than the little shrivelled, meagre, hopping, though loud and troublesome, insects of the hour."

What an inestimable addition would it be to Mr. Gladstone's great gifts if he had more humor! Far from lacking, as some suppose, a sense of humor, he enjoys a *jeu d'esprit* most keenly, and in private occasionally lets one drop from his lips. But his *perfervidum ingenium* and his deep moral earnestness repress in public the natural flow of his humor, which would otherwise give relief not only to the monotony of argumentation, but to the extreme tension of his mind. The poet Praed, who was a member of Parliament, had a lively sense of the absurdities of politicians, and seeing the Speaker asleep during a debate in the House of Commons, sang: —

> "Sleep, Mr. Speaker! Harvey will soon
> Move to abolish the sun and moon;
> Hume will, no doubt, be taking the sense
> Of the House on a question of sixteen pence;
> Statesmen will howl, and patriots will bray, —
> Sleep, Mr. Speaker, sleep while you may."

A taste for wit and humor is needed by every man to preserve his mind from warp and narrowness. It has been said that a poet should have much of the philosopher in him, and that, on the other hand, the philosopher should have much of the poet in him. In like manner, "our graver faculties and thoughts are much chastened and bettered by a blending and interfusion of the lighter, so that 'the sable cloud' may 'turn her silver lining to the night,' and our lighter thoughts require the graver to substantiate them

and keep them from evaporating." Socrates maintained that a great tragic poet ought also to be a great comic poet, — a union which is signally realized in Shakspeare. "No heart," says Archdeacon Hare, "would have been strong enough to hold the woe of Lear and Othello, except that which had the unquenchable elasticity of Falstaff and the 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'" A philanthropist of all men should have a quick sense of humor. Unless relieved by enjoyment of the comic, an extreme sensitiveness to the evils and wretchedness of society becomes a source of exasperation, an infuriating torture, and leads the subject of it to become a prey to cynicism, morbid melancholy, and despair.

Wit and humor, again, are the guardians of the "minor morals" of society. The sense of the ridiculous was given us, in part, to keep absurdity within bounds; to curb the sallies of folly, eccentricity, and impudence; to check that universal selfishness which, according to Herbert Spencer, is a sign of man's fitness for his original predatory mode of life; and thus to lay the basis for that propriety and decorum upon which the pleasure of social intercourse so largely depends. It is the great enemy of extravagance of every kind, and in polished circles it not only produces an exquisite attention to the feelings and opinions of others, but also prevents an over-nice and pedantic observance of the "linen decencies" and conventionalities of society. Ridicule, as Madame de Staël says, "is the sword of Damocles." The fear of it tends to prune away the little social *gaucheries* of men, — to prevent those violations of good taste which are so common among sensible but ill-bred or thoughtless men, and to check those insults which arise from coarseness of mind, ignorance, and lack of *savoir*

faire, rather than from malignity of disposition. There are many offences against decency, propriety, and good taste which are not registered in the social code as crimes, of which you cannot convict a man before a jury, and for which you cannot fine or imprison him, but which are nevertheless destructive of the comfort of society, and therefore need to be chastised. While graver offences are consigned for correction to the tribunals, these are justly exposed to ridicule: —

> "Nor small the debt society should pay
> To him who flaps its buzzing flies away, —
> Those noisome insects, on eternal wing,
> That hum at banquets, or in ball-rooms sting;
> Which, though they cannot heart or mind o'erpower,
> May fret the smoothness of the calmest hour."

Wit and humor do much to smooth the intercourse of life. "Dear Dash!" said Sydney Smith of a scented friend, and, as he said it, he glanced around with a merry twinkle in his eye, "he makes all the country round smell like Piccadilly." Just so humor makes society pleasant. When we are thrown among strangers, when we are in a circle of persons with whom we have no other means of sympathy, how often is a stroke of humor or a burst of merriment the "touch of nature which makes the whole world kin!" The power of wit and humor, especially the latter, in allaying anger, not only of individuals, but of large bodies of men, is well known. What was the secret of Dr. Nott's power over raging men but his contagious, resistless humor? It is notorious that he could disperse a mob more quickly than a mayor with his drilled police. When men are hot with controversy, how much does humor do to preserve their good feeling and to soften their words! How

it mitigates the fierceness of argumentative conflict! How it restrains the defeated combatant from saying those stinging, lacerating things which are never forgotten, while it allows him a mild and excusable revenge! An incident which occurred many years ago at a theatrical performance in Edinburgh, Scotland, shows how much more effective is wit than indignant remonstrance in extinguishing a nuisance: —

"During the representation a presuming young coxcomb chose to render himself conspicuous, by standing up in the midst of the pit all through the progress of the first act of the play. His neighbors were at first too polite to insist on his conforming to the usual regulations, and merely represented to him the inconvenience those behind must suffer, — to which he paid no manner of attention. The audience at last began to testify their displeasure; the cry of 'Turn him out!' became universal; and a riot would most probably have ensued from the indignation of one party and the obstinacy of the other, had it not been for a device of the witty Hon. Henry Erskine. Laying a wager with a gentleman near him that he would accomplish the matter by a single sentence, Mr. Erskine stood up, and, addressing himself to the persons who were *forcing* compliance on the obstinate youth, exclaimed: 'Leave him alone, gentlemen! *It is only a tailor resting himself!*' A roar of laughter followed the exclamation, the efficacy of which was immediately testified by the disappointed object of it, whose only motive was to impress those around him with a high notion of his fashion and gentility."

The value of humor to the teacher, to speakers and writers, to all, in short, who have occasion to instruct, inform, or admonish their fellow-men, can hardly be exaggerated. All literary artists of the highest rank have humor; indeed, it may almost be said that there is really no fine writing in which humor has not an implicit, if not an explicit, part. This quality may not always be visible,

it may not rise to the surface, or flame out into a joke or a witticism; but it gives piquancy, sparkle, and brilliancy, it warns a writer against the oracular, the silly, and the ridiculous, and saves him from falling into platitude and dulness. Who are the most successful teachers, by tongue or pen? Is it those who have the largest stores of knowledge and the most solemn convictions of the importance of their themes; or is it not rather those who, other things being equal, treat the gravest subjects in a playful style, mingle, as did Pascal and Sydney Smith, pleasantry with logic, and hide with the ivy-wreath the point of the thyrsus? How, again, is error best confronted and confuted? Is it with scowling looks, with angry sarcasms, and biting, rankling words of venom, or with a good-humored, smiling face, with quiet innuendo, sportive irony, and that genial, lambent humor which, like summer sheet-lightning, hurts nobody, and illuminates everything with soft, bright flashes?

What a gain it would have been to Milton's genius, had his austerity been relieved by the gift of humor! Wit he had, of a certain clumsy, ponderous kind, reminding one of the elephant "wreathing his lithe proboscis," also an infinite power of scorn, and a wonderful mastery of the vocabulary of abuse and sarcasm; but of humor, hardly a spark. Had he possessed a sense of the ridiculous, would he have introduced artillery and gunpowder into his battle of the angels, or in his controversies have descended from the empyrean throne of contemplation to use the language of the fish-market? Such a faculty would have restrained him from inveighing, in the pomp of lofty Latin, against the love-affairs of that "circumforaneous pharmacopola," Morus, or representing that to have kissed a girl was the

blackest of crimes. Again, what admirer of Wordsworth does not deeply lament his lack of humor? It would be impossible to find any real mirth, any keen sense of the comic, in a page of his poems. In that sly love of a jest that lurks in the down-looking eye of Chaucer, as well as in the broad and manly capacity of laughter that distinguished Burns, the Lake poet, as Professor Masson observes, is totally wanting. "He may feel contempt, as, indeed, few men are said to have done in a greater degree, but he has no art in the ludicrous expression of it; he sometimes smiles, but he never laughs." So, again, with Shelley: had he possessed humor, his, according to an acute American critic, might have been the third name in English poetry. The same defect characterizes the writings of Schiller. They all exhibit plenty of insight, sensibility, and creative power; but, excepting the "Wallenstein-Lager," in which the humor is of the thinnest, no sportiveness, no drollery, none of that comic quality which gave such power to the Muse of Byron. And yet it was Schiller who said that "the last perfection of our faculties is, that their activity, without ceasing to be sure and earnest, become *sport*." "What a pity it is that the great poet in Victor Hugo," says Amiel in his Journal, "could not get clear of the charlatan! A few pricks of Voltaire's irony would have made the inflation of this genius collapse, and rendered him stronger by rendering him saner."

Who can estimate the value of humor to the professional man? Is not the physician who is a humorist doubly welcome to the sick man's couch? Does not many a patient, especially in nervous diseases, owe his cure as much to the smile, to the cheery tone, the pleasant jest, of the doctor, as to his skill and his drugs? Alexander Smith finely says:

"The lawyer who is a humorist is a man of ten thousand. How easily the worldly wise face, puckered over a stiff brief, relaxes into the lines of laughter! He sees many an evil side of human nature, he is familiar with slanders and injustice, all kinds of human bitterness and falsity; but neither his hand nor his heart becomes 'embued with that it works in,' and the little admixture of acid, inevitable from his circumstances and mode of life, but heightens the flavor of his humor. But of all the humorists of the professional class, I prefer the clergyman, especially if he is well stricken in years, and has been anchored all his life in a country charge. He is none of your loud wits. There is a lady-like delicacy in his mind, a constant sense of his holy office, which warn him off dangerous subjects. This reserve, however, does but improve the quality of his mirth. What his humor loses in boldness, it gains in depth and shyness. And as the good man has seldom had the opportunity of making a joke, or of procuring an auditor who can understand one, the dewy glitter of his eyes as you sit opposite him, and his heartfelt enjoyment of the matter in hand, are worth going a considerable way to witness."

Few persons appreciate the extent to which the wit and humor of a people throw light on their national character. Many writers have seen in proverbs indications of national traits and peculiarities; but the value of jests to the student of ethnology and history has been either overlooked or slightly regarded. As a Cuvier reconstructs a fossil animal from a tooth or a diminutive bone, so the speculative philosopher may acquaint himself with the most complex conditions of past life and society by the study of a satire or an epigram. Had not the plays of Aristophanes been preserved for us, how defective would be our knowledge of the Athenian people! Upon the skeleton which the historian gives us, he lays the flesh and blood. The "chaff" of the old Greek city lives on his imperishable page; his marvellous rhythm and perfect

Attic style have preserved for us the trifles that floated in the air of the city of the golden grasshopper, as flies are preserved in amber. It is said that when the elder Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, wrote to Plato to ask information about the state of affairs at Athens, the philosopher sent him a copy of Aristophanes' "Clouds," as the most faithful picture of that marvellous republic. So with the Satires of Horace, which take us into the very heart of the Eternal City. The luxurious and voluptuous life of the Romans in the time of Augustus; the attempts of the wealthy freedman and the provincial magistrate to ape the life and manners of the great; the assiduous flattery paid by legacy-hunters to wealthy and childless bachelors; the mania for writing verse and reciting it to friends, "fastening on them like a leech, that will not quit the skin till full of blood," — these and many other follies of the age are reflected in the Satires of Horace as with the pitiless clearness of a mirror.

We are aware that there are persons who have no relish for wit, — nay, who even hate it. A friend of Count Marcellus (a member of the Bonald and De Maistre school of theology and politics) was congratulating him one day on the cleverness with which the "Quotidienne," an organ of the Royalists, was conducted, and closed by saying that it was even a witty paper. "Ah!" replied the count, "that's what vexes me; there is always something Satanic in wit." So, doubtless, has thought every bigot, — every foe to progress, every Jesuitical casuist, every trickster and charlatan, who has felt the sting of wit, — since the days of Noah. Wit is so often administered as a medicine to rascality, folly, or presumption, that knaves, fools, and coxcombs dislike it as they do physic. Again, there are

other persons who regard wit and humor as frivolous, and therefore unworthy of a serious mind. They think that wit is rarely accompanied by judgment, — a doctrine, strange to say, sanctioned by Locke, which, as Sterne says, "has been made the Magna Charta of stupidity ever since." Because the outward signs of a witty man are very similar to those of a frivolous man, and the external signs of a wise man similar to those of a dull man, the owl-like gravity of some persons hastily decides that wit and wisdom are opposed to each other, and that therefore the humorous man must necessarily be a trifler. But, paradoxical as it may seem to such reasoners, so far is it from being true that wit and wisdom are usually separated, there is probably no attribute more common to the highest order of mind than this of wit. That very aptitude for imaginative conceptions or for detecting resemblances, analogies, and differences, which qualifies genius for making scientific discoveries, qualifies it also for detecting the analogies on which wit is founded. It is the strongest mind also that perceives most quickly and feels most keenly the endless and ever-recurring contradictions, incongruities, inconsistencies, and paradoxes of life, — the contact of the tragic and the comic, the sublime and the ridiculous, — and all those absurdities which provoke the ridicule of the wit and the laughter of the humorist. "We commonly," says Pascal, "picture Plato and Aristotle in stately robes, and as personages always grave and solemn. *They were good fellows, who laughed like others with their friends.* And when they composed their laws and treatises of policy, it was done smilingly, and to divert themselves; it was the least philosophic and serious part of their life. Their highest philosophy

was to live simply and tranquilly." Cicero often employed the weapon of irony against his opponents; and Cæsar had so keen a relish for wit that at a time when he was busiest with the cares of State he made a compilation of facetiæ and apothegms, in which he inserted some of Cicero's happiest witticisms. Philip of Macedon and Sulla were fond of jokes. Dr. Arnold, when describing the great Carthaginian general as putting on various disguises to baffle the attempts to assassinate him, says that "he wore false hair, appearing sometimes as a man of mature years, and sometimes with the gray hair of old age; and if he had *that taste for humor which great men are seldom without*, he must have been often amused by the mistakes thus occasioned, and have derived entertainment from that which policy or necessity dictated."

Luther was full of humor. He cracked jokes with Kate, his wife, and replied to the savage denunciations of his enemies by merry jests. A defender of the monk, in speaking of his plainness and even coarseness of speech, says that "the humor with which he was richly gifted, and which is the natural associate of an intense love of truth, if it be not rather a particular form and manifestation of that love, led him to strip off the artificial drapery and conventional formalities of life, and to look straight at the realities hidden beneath them in their naked contrasts and contradictions." Lord Bacon, who was richly endowed with wit, did not disdain to make a collection of jests, and he tells us that not only Cæsar, but Macrobius, "a consular man," did the same. Sir Thomas More, to the last hour of his life, was fond of pleasantry and humor, and kept a jester. Queen Elizabeth, haughty and stiff-starched as she was, relished humor so much that in 1583 she ordered that

twelve comedians should be made grooms of the chamber and arrayed in her livery. Tarlton, one of these, had great influence with the queen, Fuller tells us, and could "undumpish" her at his will. She herself sometimes ventured on a grim jest; and when the Archduke of Austria raised the siege of Grave, she said to her secretary: "Wot you that the archduke is risen from the Grave?" Nearly all the great poets, prose-writers, orators, and philosophers of all ages have been witty men, while those persons who have been distinguished as wits have possessed also higher intellectual qualities and solid acquirements. In Aristotle, Alexander, Demosthenes, Solon, Socrates, Cervantes, Descartes, Pascal, Fontenelle, Boileau, Molière, Goethe, Chaucer, Bacon, Cowley, Pope, Dryden, Swift, Johnson, and Burke we find striking examples of the union of the lighter with the graver qualities of the mind; and of Shakspeare's licensed fooling, which he sometimes carries so far, Hazlitt has finely said that nothing can justify this extreme relaxation but extreme tension. "For this he might be blamed, did not it take away our breath to follow his eagle-flights, or if he did not at other times make the cordage of our hearts crack. After our heads ache with thinking, it is fair to play the fool."

Almost all the great statesmen of modern times have shown themselves possessed of humor, and we sometimes find a vein of it running through the hardest mental marble. William Pitt's sense of fun, though masked in public by an air and bearing of gravity and dignity, was in private his most striking characteristic. "Don't tell me," he once said, "of a man's being able to talk sense; every one can talk sense. Can he talk nonsense?" Wilberforce, who had known the wittiest men of his time, always de-

clared that the wit of Pitt was the best he had ever known. It was this so-called "cast-iron man" who wrote the last and best stanza of the famous song in the "Anti-Jacobin," about

"the U-
niversity of Göttingen."

Of Pitt's great parliamentary foe, Fox, Lord Brougham tells us that there was no weapon of argument which that consummate debater employed more frequently and successfully than wit. William Wirt tells a friend in a letter: "I have always found a little nonsense a capital preparation for a dry and close argument."

Even the great master of romance, Sir Walter Scott, is likely to be remembered for his humor longer than for any of his other splendid gifts. No doubt such masterpieces of word-painting as that of Rebecca appearing before the Templars, will long haunt the human brain. Not soon will the world forget the exquisite pathos of some of the scenes in the "Antiquary" and the "Heart of Midlothian;" as, for example, the scene between the Antiquary and the Fisherman, whose stern, iron nature breaks down under the loss of his son, and carries with it the stoic pride and cynicism of his learned visitor; and the scene in which Davie Deans is told of his daughter's sin and shame, and in his agony, which all human sympathy is impotent to relieve, begs his friends to leave him, — "Leave me, sirs, leave me. I maun warstle wi' this trial in privacy, and on my knees." But memorable as are these scenes, we doubt if their pathos recurs as often to the admirers of Scott as the matchless humor that sparkles in those creations of his brain, Dominie Sampson, Oldbuck of Monkbarns, Bailie Nicoll Jarvie, the Laird of Dumbiedikes,

Baron Bradwardine, Mause Headrigg, and the inimitable Dalgetty.

Again, it is said that the laughter which wit and humor produce often implies contempt of those who are its objects, and so is unchristian. I shall consider this objection more fully hereafter, and simply reply here that the perception of incongruity, which is the occasion of laughter, may exist without the slightest scorn, or even disapprobation, of the object laughed at. It must be remembered that there is a distinction between laughing *at* and laughing *with* any one, and that the humorist often laughs at himself. The absurdity of the statement that laughter implies contempt is shown by Sydney Smith's relation to the Earl of Dudley. "You have been laughing at me constantly, Sydney," said the earl, "for the last seven years; and in all that time you never said a single thing to me that I wished unsaid." Did Lamb lack respect for Coleridge? He jested and laughed at his life-long friend again and again; but he never, amid the most eccentric sallies of his wit, ceased to love and venerate the philosopher and poet. If these examples do not suffice to show that the perception of the ridiculous does not necessarily imply bitterness and scorn, we have another and a conclusive proof in the world's greatest bard. Keen as was the wit, and intense as was the humor, which accompanied his piercing insight into the depths of human nature, he was nevertheless addressed by Ben Jonson as "My gentle Shakspeare."

Finally, it is urged against wit and humor that they are apt to be indulged in to excess, and that when excessive or ill-timed, nothing is more wearisome. But is not this a liability which they share with eloquence, music, and many other excellent things which we nevertheless greatly prize?

This liability cannot, then, be justly made an objection against wit and humor, although it may be so made against their misuse. As Samuel Bailey has finely observed: "Enjoyment of every kind must of course have intermissions, and the more exquisite the pleasure, the more is a suspension required. We sicken at perpetual lusciousness; we loathe the unvarying atmosphere of a scented room, although 'all Arabia breathes' from its recesses. 'The breath of flowers,' as Bacon beautifully observes, 'is far sweeter in the air, when it comes and goes like the warbling of music, than in the hand.' Even the rich illustrations which fancy scatters over the page of the orator or the poet may be crowded on each other too fast. In eloquence, in fiction, in poetry, in every work intended to yield high and permanent pleasure, the body of the work must undoubtedly be something solid, something addressed to good sense or earnest feeling. The figurative decorations must appear no more than elegant foliage or beautiful convolutions surmounting the steadfast columns of thought and sentiment. Poets of mere imaginative power, however dazzling, who have not possessed considerable strength of intellect, have never been able to keep a high place in public estimation. For a while we are pleased to rise above the earth, and wing our way through the atmosphere of fancy; but we soon grow weary of an excursion which is all flight. In defiance of Bishop Berkeley, we must have a world of solid matter to alight and repose on."

A writer in an English periodical expresses the opinion that the day of witty people has gone by. "If there be men clever enough nowadays to say smart things, they are too clever to say them. The world we live in prefers placidity to brilliancy; and a man like Curran in our present-

day society would be as unwelcome as a pyrotechnist with a pocketful of squibs." The very reverse of this we believe to be the truth. It is just in proportion as society advances in civilization and refinement that the occasions for wit and humor multiply, and that men are quick to perceive and appreciate these qualities. Can any one believe that the wit of "Punch," with the exquisite comic illustrations of Leech and Doyle, could have been produced in any other age than this, or in any other place and social conditions than those of the British capital? Clowns have no wit; they may have humor, but it is of the coarsest kind. There is no reason to believe that there was much wit or humor in the early ages of the world. Savages, with whom life is a perpetual struggle for the means of life, are always grave; they have too few ideas to have formed any ideal of what should be; they have no notion of the decencies and proprieties of life, and consequently no notion of its incongruities, which are the source of humor. Nothing surprises them that is not grossly tangible, and no humor tickles or amuses them but mimicry and buffoonery of the broadest kind. There is no one thing regarding which the cultivated man is separated by a wider gulf from the illiterate or vulgar than in regard to his jocularity, — as may be seen by comparing with the complex and exquisite pleasure yielded by a real witticism the incident or jest which shakes the sides of a coal-heaver. George Eliot shrewdly observes:

"The history and literature of the ancient Hebrews give the idea of a people who went about their business and their pleasures as gravely as a society of beavers; the smile and the laugh are often mentioned metaphorically, but the smile is one of complacency, the laugh is one of scorn. Nor can we imagine that the facetious element was very strong in the Egyptians; no laughter lurks in the wondering eyes and the broad,

calm lips of their statues. Still less can the Assyrians have had a genius for the comic; the round eyes and simpering satisfaction of their ideal faces belong to a type which is not witty, but the cause of wit in others. The fun of these early races was, we fancy, of the after-dinner kind, — loud-throated laughter over the wine-cup, taken too little account of in sober moments to enter as an element into their art, and differing as much from the laughter of a Chamfort or a Sheridan as the gastronomic enjoyment of an Ancient Briton, whose dinner had no other 'removes' than from acorns to beechmast, and back again to acorns, differed from the subtle pleasures of the palate experienced by his turtle-eating descendant."

The complaints of the decay of wit in our day are like the complaint of the degeneracy of men in size and strength: they have no foundation in fact. This notion has been justly attributed, in part, to an error in our mental perspective, by which we bring the wit of all ages to one focus, — fancying that the accumulated brilliant *jeux d'esprit* of the past, which were uttered at long intervals of time, were said at a particular period; that things which were really far apart were close together; thus making the witticisms of our own day seem comparatively "few and far between."

To conclude: having thus pointed out some of the most important, but by no means all, of the uses of wit and humor, I have shown, I think, that within their proper sphere they are not only a source of exquisite pleasure, but, when rightly employed, instruments of great utility. It is enough that these faculties form a part of the talents with which man is gifted; the gift makes their culture a duty. They are powers which will surely be abused if they are not trained, disciplined, and directed to good uses. There will be a literature of wicked wit to fascinate and

poison men, unless that of a pure and healthful kind is cultivated. If it was "a wretched delusion when Stoicism strove to stiffen humanity into stone," there was not less wrong in later days when Puritanism scowled upon innocent, wholesome mirth, and discouraged with a frown all pleasantry and jesting. A similar injustice is done to-day by many persons who have a keen relish for wit and humor, but manifest for the authors of their enjoyment little gratitude or respect. Indeed, the general feeling of the public toward those who minister to its amusement, however legitimately, is very much allied to contempt. Adam Smith accounts for the high wages which many such receive, especially actors, singers, and dancers, by saying that they are thus bribed to abdicate their personal dignity. The disposition to disparage wits and humorists is due in part, no doubt, to the lingering influence of Puritanism, — that crabbed creed which, as Macaulay says, made men "frown at stage-plays, and smile at massacres." It is due also in a large degree to the utilitarian views and habits of the Anglo-Saxon race, leading it to scowl at all "unproductive occupations," so called; to the fact that the wit and the humorist have too often taken the place of the mediæval fool, and earned their living by making their patrons laugh; and, lastly, not a little to the fear of Mrs. Grundy, — that awful and ubiquitous personage, "at once Fate, Nemesis, and Fury," the glare of whose eye is danger, the pointing of whose finger is fashionable death. That guardian of life's proprieties has declared that it is not respectable to joke, scarcely so even to laugh at jests, and that wit and humor are dangerous powers. Mrs. Grundy is right in half of her assertion. Wit and humor *are* dangerous; and so, it has been said, is everything which has energy and

vigor for its characteristics. The cultivation of science is dangerous, the practice of charity is dangerous, eloquence is dangerous, "a great fool is almost as dangerous as a great genius;" nothing is absolutely harmless but that which is as powerless for good as it is for evil. But "when," as Sydney Smith, with equal wisdom and felicity of language, observes, "wit is combined with sense and information; when it is softened by benevolence, and restrained by strong principle; when it is in the hands of a man who can use it and despise it, who can be witty and something much *better* than witty, who loves honor, justice, decency, good-nature, morality, and religion ten thousand times better than wit, — wit is *then* a beautiful and delightful part of our nature. There is no more interesting spectacle than to see the effects of wit upon the different characters of men, — than to observe it expanding caution, relaxing dignity, unfreezing coldness, teaching age and care and pain to smile, extorting reluctant gleams of pleasure from melancholy, and charming even the pangs of grief. It is pleasant to observe how it penetrates through the coldness and awkwardness of society, gradually bringing men nearer together, and, like the combined force of wine and oil, giving every man a glad heart and a shining countenance. Genuine and innocent wit like this is surely the *flavor of the mind!* Man could direct his ways by plain reason, and support his life by tasteless food; but God has given us wit and flavor and brightness and laughter and perfumes to enliven the days of man's pilgrimage and to 'charm his pained steps over the burning marl.'"

CHAPTER III.

THE ABUSES OF WIT AND HUMOR.

Or send to us
Thy wit's great surplus;
But teach us yet
Wisely to husband it,
Lest we that talent spend,
And having once brought to an end
That precious stock, the store
Of such a wit, the world should have no more. — HERRICK.

Be no mocker; mocks follow them that delight therein. He shall be sure of shame that feeleth no grief in other men's shames. — SIR THOMAS WYATT TO HIS SON.

Wilt thou show thy whole wealth of wit in an instant? — MERCHANT OF VENICE.

IN the preceding chapter I have sought to show that the faculties of wit and humor are among our most precious possessions. They are not only a source of exquisite enjoyment, but instruments of unquestionable good. They serve not only "to point a moral and adorn a tale," to wing many a maxim, and to give edge and point to many a truth, but also, —

"when sensual pleasures cloy,
To fill the languid pause with finer joy,"

and to cheat misfortune, ennui, and melancholy of their sting. They also protect society from rudeness, pretension, and charlatanism. Much as the world suffers from these evils, it would suffer immeasurably more could they

be combated only with the slow and heavy artillery of reason, instead of being assailed with the light weapons of wit.

It is the thoughtful, serious-minded man that most needs the recreation which wit and humor supply. The more profound are a man's impressions of the significance of life, the greater is the necessity that he should have a keen sense of the ludicrous, as an offset or foil to the tragic weight of his thoughts and feelings. But while such persons suffer more than others from the lack of this counterpoise, it is needed by all. Without a sprinkling or two of fun, nonsense, and frivolity, pray what would become of us all in these days of anarchism, strikes, suicide, fluctuating money-markets, failures, and dynamite explosions? Say what you will of this "solemn world," — and such, alas! it too often is, — a little of the sherry must be mixed with the bitters of life to help us to digest our dinners and sleep o' nights; and a little of the *vanitas vanitatum* will intermingle gratefully with the sterner alarums of existence. There must be some folly, or there could be no wisdom; some broad grins, or even tears would lose their meaning; and the music of life will have a new charm if now and then in the world's orchestra the notes of the flageolet are heard over those of the deep-toned bassoon.

But though we may not approve the taste of those who

> "In arioso trills and graces
> Never stray,
> But gravissimo solemn basses
> Hum away;"

and though we may deem "Laughter holding both his sides" as infinitely preferable to

> "loathèd Melancholy,
> Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born," —

yet surely life was not intended to be a perpetual joke, one long holiday of fun and laughter. The tragic is a more staple element of our existence than the comic. "Life is real, life is earnest;" and since we are surrounded by solemn and startling mysteries which should be contemplated with a devout and becoming gravity, humor cannot be regarded as an ultimate constituent of our happiness, but only as a transient lightener of our earthly load, — a safety-valve to relieve us from the overwhelming pressure of care, grief, or disappointment; a by-play of the mind to divert it from the too-constant contemplation of what is beyond mortal solution. Like all other good things, wit and humor have their times and seasons, as well as their appropriate places, and to be most effective need to be intermingled with less pungent qualities. Their true mission is to be a seasoning to the grave purposes, the weighty deeds, and the elevated pleasures of life. Fuller, the witty and wise old divine, tells us that when the Earl of Leicester, knowing that Queen Elizabeth delighted to see a gentleman dance well, brought the master of a dancing-school to do so before her, "Pish!" said the queen, "it is his profession." She liked dancing, not when it was a master-quality, but when it accompanied other and more solid accomplishments. So with wit and humor: it is when they have a ground-work of good sense and substantial thought, — when they are blended with valuable information, with powerful eloquence, or deep pathos, — that their products, like those of the fancy or the imagination, are the most pleasing.

De Maistre said of Madame de Staël, with whom he had chatted in Geneva: "As for wit, she is extraordinarily brilliant *when she is not trying to be so.*" In conversation wit should spring naturally out of the interchange of thought;

it should be "like the sparkle from a grindstone, the casual brilliance of an intellect in fruitful activity." To strive after epigram "with malice prepense and aforethought" is to destroy the spontaneity which is the charm of an unrestrained flow of conversation. Talk all wit is as unpleasantly monotonous as a dinner all champagne. When a man is uniformly spoken of as "a wit,"—when he encourages the expectation of squibs and crackers as often as he opens his mouth,—it is evident that he has no other remarkable gift, and that he is but a second-rate converser. "He was so well dressed," said somebody of a certain person to Beau Brummell, "that people would turn and look at him." "Then he was *not* well dressed," said the great leader of fashion. It is in the combination of wit and humor with higher qualities that the mastery of Shakspeare is seen. Gervinus, the German critic, observes that an equal sense of jest and earnest, according to the demands of life and opportunity, was the ideal to which the great English poet would have rendered homage; "for however penetrated he was with the idea that moderate, cheerful jest confirmed and promoted the truth and freedom of the mind, he knew also that the laughers by profession never pierce through the surface of things, where, as Bacon says, is the seat of a jest. Throughout, therefore, he has given his healthiest humorists part of the seriousness of life as their dowry. . . . His stinging wit is pointed against the gibing spirit, 'whose influence is begot of that loose grace which shallow laughing hearers give to fools;' and just as much against the silent oracles, who by empty silence hope to gain the reputation of wisdom. He has equal sympathy with jest and earnest; he hates with his Rosaline those who are in extremity of either laughing or melancholy; he has a tear

of feeling for the dark, and the gladdest laugh for the bright side of the world, and he controls with equal power our emotions of joy and of sorrow."

Mr. Lowell has justly observed that "true humor is never divorced from a moral conviction." While, indulged in at proper times and seasons, it is a gracious and kindly, as well as tricksome spirit, it is far otherwise with facetiousness, which is "often terribly like the grinning of a death's head." Healthful as the exercise of the mirth-making faculty unquestionably is when it is exercised in just proportion with other faculties, the habitual indulgence of it is as injurious to its possessor as it is wearisome to his acquaintance. The Wise Man tells us that laughter is mad, and that the end of mirth is heaviness. The richest, rarest, most exquisite humor is more nearly allied to a tear than to a broad grin. There was a deep wisdom in the Athenian law which interdicted a judge of the Areopagus from writing a comedy. The habit of looking at things on the ludicrous side is always hurtful to the moral feelings. It is sure to lower the tone of thought, and to satisfy its cravings by viewing the gravest and most sacred things only in a comic light. It is said of Sheridan that by his habit of looking at life and its duties through the medium of epigram he gradually lost all sincerity of thought and all earnestness of purpose. His moral sense was steadily impaired, till at last his conscience gave him no sting which a jest could not heal. False to his marriage-vows, cheating his creditors without the slightest scruple or compunction, he seemed to look upon adultery, dishonesty, trickery, and intemperance as practical jokes. It was of such inveterate jesters that Pascal must have been thinking when he said: "Diseur de bons mots, mauvais caractère."

A jesting spirit is not more fatal to serious purpose than to profound thought, close argument, and warm and elevating sentiment. Admiration for noble deeds, that "sign and measure of high souls," delight in the manifestations of beauty, devout joy that there are or have been in the world souls higher than our own, in the contemplation of whom we may raise and invigorate ourselves, — are unknown to those who find their highest delight in a gibing or mocking spirit. The power of warmly liking anything is forfeited in such minds; their very pleasures, such as they are, are stricken with impotence.

Never, perhaps, was this gibing and vulgarizing spirit more prevalent than it is in many circles to-day. The present has often been pronounced the age of mechanical discovery, of great economical and political appliances, the age of steam, of free-trade, of reform; but a more appropriate title, it seems to us, would be the age of mirth or comicality. Certain it is that joking is carried to a height which it has rarely reached at any former epoch. The literature of the day, instead of being merely enlivened with occasional sprinklings of fun, with a refined and delicate humor which does not spring from words alone, but has intense meanings underneath the grotesque sounds, is consecrated to "Laughter holding both his sides," to Momus and broad-grins. Joking has, in fact, become a trade. The cap-and-bells, which once, like greatness, were "thrust upon" a man because he had a genius for jesting, are now assumed with cold-blooded calculation. Wit, that splendid zigzag of the mind which defies accurate analysis, though it electrifies all that it touches, is manufactured, like Sheffield hardware, at a fixed tariff. From the Thomas A'Beckets who write "Comic Blackstones" and "Comic Histories of Rome" and

"England," down to the editors and contributors of the so-called funny newspapers, a large number of the writers of the times are in a daily or hebdomadal agony to say witty things. That under such circumstances the dreariest trash should be put forth for humor, is to be expected; but this is the smallest evil that flows from the effort to be facetious *invita Minerva*, at fixed times, with deliberate intent, and at so much per sheet. A greater mischief is, that in the state of intellectual bankruptcy which speedily ensues, the Petronii of our newspapers soon cease to discriminate between the real and the spurious, and mistake slang for wit. Unable to wield the weapon of Aristophanes and Horace, of Shakspeare and Molière, they indulge in mere buffoonery, and thus much of our newspaper literature vibrates between "the pinched-up Puritanism of the North and the bull-mouthed savagery of the Southwest."

But I purposed to speak not so much of this literary scrofula which afflicts many of the authors and journalists of the day, as of the jesting spirit, the *persiflage* and mocking tone which pervade the circles, and especially the youthful circles, of society. It is no exaggeration to say that one may now pass a whole evening in company and hear hardly a word spoken in earnest, nothing but a rattling fire of "quips and cranks and wanton wiles," from the hour of meeting to midnight. Generally, the leader on such occasions, the master-spirit who pitches the key of the conversation, is some smart young man who has cheated himself into the belief that he is a wit by nature, and has a turn for "the funny." Of all the grovelling and disagreeable animals that infest society and make it the Sahara that it sometimes is, there is none more annoying to every person of sense that comes within earshot of him than a

youth with such a conceit. When once this flea gets into his ear, it revolutionizes the whole man. Henceforth, instead of trying to cultivate and improve his brains by study, he sets up for a second Hood, and crucifies them unceasingly to maintain his reputation as a buffoon. Fancying that the world depends upon him for its fun, that the slightest wagging of his tongue is the signal for a universal splitting of sides, the summit of his ambition, the polar star to which his intellectual energies point with undeviating constancy, is a low joke and its recognitory grin. Becoming at last a confirmed and hardened joker, he lets not the most innocent remark escape harmless; he pounces, hawk-like, on every poor, luckless observation which by any twisting can be placed in a ludicrous juxtaposition, and every unhappy word which by any torturing can be made susceptible of two meanings. No reverence has he for high and solemn things, no admiration for the noble, or love for the beautiful. High, solemn, noble, and beautiful are qualities he appreciates only because they can be turned into the broadest burlesque, — just as the sweetest cider makes the sourest vinegar. The gravest themes of human contemplation he studies only with a view to suggesting comical images and associations, and a remark as gloomy as death will, in passing through his mind, acquire the motley livery of a harlequin. There are certain moods of mind in which a jest is as nauseous as a pill; but your cold-blooded, hardened wit would crack a joke by the bedside of a dying friend, would greet the sunrise from the summit of Mont Blanc, or the sunset from the Rigi-Kulm, with a pun, and tickle your ribs at the foot of the cataract of Niagara. Nay, even in the hour of his own dissolution the *vis comica* is still triumphant; and, like that dying man who,

when asked by the priest who had come to give him extreme unction, "Where are your feet?" answered, "*At the ends of my legs, to be sure*," his last breath is a jest, his last aspiration a wish to provoke laughter.

This superfœtation of humor has disgusted many persons with all humor. They feel that this incessant rattle, this ceaseless jesting upon the gravest themes, must ultimately lessen a man's sense of the gravity of human life, and weaken the strength and authority of the moral convictions of those who listen to it. Barrow, of whom it has been said that he himself might have outshone, had he chosen so to do, all the wits of Charles's court, and beaten them with weapons like their own, but of a more dazzling blade, a keener edge, and a finer temper, has treated this folly with the contempt it merits. "A man of ripe age and sound judgment," he says, "for refreshment to himself, or in compliance to others, may sometimes condescend to play in this or in any harmless way. But *to be fond of it*, to prosecute it with a careful and painful eagerness, to dote and dwell upon it, to reckon it a brave or a fine thing, a singular matter of commendation, a transcendent accomplishment, anywise preferable to rational endowments or comparable to the moral excellencies of the mind (to solid knowledge or sound wisdom, or true virtue and goodness), this is extremely childish or brutish, and far below a man. What can be more absurd than *to make a business of play*, to be studious and laborious in toys, to make a profession or drive a trade of impertinency? What more plain nonsense can there be than to be earnest in jest, to be continual in divertisement or constant in pastime, to make extravagance all our way, and *sauce all our diet?* Is not this plainly the life of a child, that is ever busy, yet never

hath anything to do, or the life of that mimical brute which is always active in playing uncouth and unlucky tricks, which, could it speak, might surely pass well for a professed wit?"

It was a wise admonition which Lord Chesterfield gave to his son: "Appear to have rather less than more wit than you really have. A wise man will live at least as much within his wit as his income." Holy George Herbert had anticipated this advice a century before. It is curious to find the man of fashion echoing the divine: —

> "Wit 's an unruly engine, wildly striking
> Sometimes a friend, sometimes the engineer.
> Hast thou the knack? pamper it not with liking;
> But if thou want it, buy it not too dear.
> Many affecting wit beyond their power,
> Have got to be a dear fool for an hour.
>
> "If thou be master-gunner, speak not all
> That thou canst speak at once, but husband it,
> And give men turns of speech. Do not forestall,
> By lavishness, thine own and others' wit,
> As if thou mad'st thy will. A civil guest
> Will no more talk all, than eat all the feast."

Addison somewhere expresses the opinion that every man would be a wit if he could, but adds that it were better to be a galley-slave. The dreariest and most pitiful of all occupations is that of the professional wit, who is perpetually on the watch to electrify you with his jests, or dazzle you with his brilliant sayings. Horace keenly relished a timely jest; yet he warns his countrymen, —

> "Solutos
> Qui captat risus hominum famamque dicacis,
> . . . hic niger est, hunc tu, Romane, caveto!"

That is, "The man who seeks eagerly for the loud laughter

of those around him, and the reputation of a wit, is black of heart; shun him, thou that hast the spirit of a Roman!" "The wit of the company," says Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, in one of her admirable letters, "next to the butt of the company, is the meanest person in it. The great duty of conversation is to do as you do at whist, — if the eldest hand plays the deuce of diamonds, let not his next neighbor dash down the king of hearts because his hand is full of honors. I do not love to see a man of wit win all the tricks in conversation, nor yet to see him sullenly pass." What a dreary story is that of the life of Theodore Hook, — a man of genius selling his birthright for the hard and thankless servitude of pleasing idle hours and pampered vanities! The expenses, the debts, the secret drudgery, the splitting headaches, the nervous agonies, and the heart's misery he incurred in order to maintain his false position in aristocratic circles, would be incredible if they were not so well attested. They add one more to the many signal warnings which biography gives to men of genius and wit, showing how dearly and ruinously they have to pay for an invitation to the tables of the great or a smile from my lord.

The professional joker forgets that though an occasional keen witticism "hath an ear-kissing smack" which breaks the monotony of life, yet the mood which is necessary to the full relish of it is rarely of long continuance. Nothing tires so soon as unvaried sprightliness, unshaded mirth, and brilliancy unrelieved. It is like the *toujours perdrix* of the partridge-loving French abbé, or dining continually on pepper-corns, spices, and jams. Wit is the salt of life; but no man can live on salt, or puts it into every kind of food. A succession of jests decreases in force at every shock, and the

pun that is anticipated loses half its power. The man who would have his wit *tell*, should be as chary of it as of his Sunday suit, and not loose his bagged fox in every crowd. In spite of these evident truths, there have been men in all ages who have made the culture of wit a business, the work of their lives. This was particularly the case in the times of Congreve, Farquhar, and Pope. In conversation every sentence was expected to sparkle; the lips were not to open, except to utter an epigram, an antithesis, or a *double entente*. "Ladies were to have 'wit and sweetness,' and men 'wit and fire,' — not the old mother-wit of Shakspeare and his fellows, which was a gift from the whole loving frame of Nature, but a trick of the fancy and of words which you might acquire from the brother-wit of the tavern, and which dealt chiefly in simile, with a variation of antithesis." But this perpetual straining after wit was not the worst characteristic of the *beaux esprits* of those days. Much of the so-called wit of the period in question was indecent. Mr. Lowell, in a paper on Pope, observes that his "Dunciad" was filthy even in a filthy age, and that one's mind needs to be sprinkled with some disinfecting fluid after reading it.

We are aware that wit is a form, not a garment, of the mind, and cannot always be cast off, any more than it can be put on, at will. Every one, it has been said truly, uses instinctively the weapons which Nature has furnished; the loveliest woman in the world must darn her stockings, if such be her lot, with the help of the same lustrous eyes which would enslave a hero. But we may claim at least that wit, whenever and however employed, shall be spontaneous, and bubble up of itself, like water thrown up by a fountain, and not like that forced up by a pump: in one

case the nectar of the gods, in the other no better than ditch-water. As Carlyle says: "None of us is bound to be witty under penalties. If God has bestowed on you the gift, be content with it, and do not make yourself ridiculous by assuming its counterfeit." Rabelais, Cervantes, Richter, Swift, Lamb, and Hood (who said that all his ideas entered his head upside down) were witty because they could not help it. So with Sheridan: we think of him as one who carefully studied his jests; but those quick flashes of repartee, that rolling fire of light raillery, those sharp volleys of glowing satire, that dropping flight of epigram on all things and persons, for which he was renowned, were all prefigured in the little rhymed epigrams which when a school-boy he had scrawled over his copy-book, to the infinite wrath of the teacher at whom they were levelled. Sydney Smith, again, jested, not for display or to provoke a laugh, but because he was mad with spirits, and bubbling over with humor, — because, as he said, he had to do so, or burst. Wit or humor in these men was the natural expression of their intellectual life; their whole souls were steeped in and saturated with it; and when they uttered the "quips and cranks and wanton wiles" that were in them, their jests came forth as a flood which bursts a river's banks and inundates the whole country around. As jokers they were the kings of the social circle, and their excesses were excusable because of the power they manifested. But the feeble, would-be wit, to whom Nature has been niggard of *esprit*, only makes himself ridiculous when he tries to bend the bow of Ulysses.

Miss Landon never uttered a truer sentiment than when, in one of her novels, "Francesca Cerrara," she said: "Too much love of the ridiculous is the dry-rot of all that is

high and noble in youth. Like a canker, it eats away the finest qualities of their nature; and there is no limit to the sacrifices made to it." Persons addicted to this vice speedily become incapable of deep affection for others. "I have seen many," says Lord Burleigh, Queen Elizabeth's sage councillor, "so prone to quip and gird as they would rather lose their friend than their jest. And if, perchance, their boiling brain yield a quaint scoff, they would travail to be delivered as a woman with child. These nimble fancies are but the froth of wit."

"Dum modo risum
Excutiat sibi non hic cuiquam parcit amico."

The worst schisms between friends are those produced by a witticism. The sharp edge of a witty tongue cut asunder in a few minutes the bonds of a friendship between Dr. Johnson and Baretti which was the growth of years. The Italian, calling on the moralist, was rallied on the superior skill of Omai, the Otaheitan, who had beaten him at chess. Snatching up his hat and stick, Baretti, in a storm of indignation, rushed from the room, and never visited the Doctor more. Few men have resented ridicule more promptly than that most unscrupulous of satirists and mimics, Samuel Foote. Though he never spared other men when he could be witty at their expense, he was exceedingly sensitive to jests upon himself. When at one time the actor Woodward, and at another Wilkinson, threatened him with a retort in kind, he ran to Garrick and Rich, their managers, foaming with rage, and threatening the most violent retaliations.

Almost every society is afflicted with persons who, instead of being content with what Thomson calls

"Festive mirth, and wit that knows no gall,"

"think their conceits, like mustard, not good unless they bite." Such a biting wit was Biron's in "Love's Labor's Lost," to whom Rosalind says: —

> "The world's large tongue
> Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks;
> Full of comparisons and wounding flouts;
> Which you on all estates will execute,
> That lie within the mercy of your wit."

But in our mirth, more than in anything else, we should take care, with Wordsworth,

> "Never to blend our pleasure, or our pride,
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels

To give pain in a joke is to imitate those mediæval poisoners who used to put their deadly drugs into flowers, so that their victims inhaled death from a rose. The excuses sometimes urged in defence of such cruel jesters remind one of a retort made by the Abbé Imblet when Madame de Tencin, who, with the suavest manners in the world, was utterly unprincipled, was praised for gentleness. "Aye, aye," said the Abbé, "if she had any object whatever in poisoning you, undoubtedly she would choose the sweetest and least disagreeable poison in the world." In reading Martial's epigrams, though he boasts that he has made it a rule *parcere personis, dicere de vitiis* (to spare persons, and speak only of vices), one's pleasure is greatly alloyed by the personalities and scurrilities in which they abound. Gallia, he says, keeps for the public eye the tears over her dead father; Tongilianus burns his premises to cheat the insurance companies; Afra, though a grandam, prates about her papa and her mamma; and so on *ad nauseam*. Yet the same satirist slavers the cruel Domitian with the most fulsome flattery, and declares that if he had his choice of a banquet in Olym-

pus or in that emperor's palace, he would unquestionably accept the latter.

Dr. Johnson has vividly depicted the pain which even a dull man may inflict by a contemptuous jeer: —

> "Of all the griefs that harass the distressed,
> Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest;
> Fate never wounds more deep the generous heart
> Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart."

The truest and best wit is that which gives a side-ache to everybody, and a heart-ache to nobody. It resembles, not the forked lightning of the thunder-storm, but the sheet-lightning of summer, and illuminates everything with a bright, lambent flame. It is the product of a liberal, kindly spirit, and requires a heart in the right place, and the juices of the body in good condition, as well as imagination and intellect. Like pathos, it is the offspring of sympathy, — of sympathy that embraces all men, weeps with those that weep, and rejoices with those that rejoice. Such wit has been ascribed by the poet Moore to Sheridan: —

> "His wit in the combat, as gentle as bright,
> Never carried a heart-stain away on its blade."

Shakspeare abounds in this kind of wit, — a wit without bitterness or scorn, which makes us laugh only at that which is really laughable, and which deserves to be laughed at. In his Malvolio, for example, in "Twelfth Night," we have an example of qualities not only legitimately laughable, but those of which laughter is the natural antidote, — egotism, vanity, self-conceit, egregious self-ignorance, and ignorance of his relation to others. Malvolio is not malignantly bad; it is only his blind self-adulation, his ludicrous estimate of his own personal attractions, leading him to cheat himself with the idea that the Duchess is in love with

him, that makes him a butt of our merriment; and in laughing at the troubles into which his overweening vanity leads him, we laugh not only with the heart and the understanding, but with the conscience also. Such, again, is usually the humor of Burns. It is full of humanity. Though sometimes coarse, it is rarely cruel; it is rich in all the heart's sweet juices, and has only just so much of acid as is needed to give pungency to its sweetness. In his "Farewell to Auld Nichie," he shows pity for even the arch-enemy of man, and would give Satan himself an opportunity for repentance and a chance of heaven.

How different from this is much of that which passes for humor in our day! A great deal of what provokes laughter in the literature of the age is simply irreverent, indecent, or brutal. It is a Mephistophelean wit, which springs not from joyousness of spirit, but from bitterness of heart; which desecrates everything that is sacred, and degrades everything that is noble; which mocks at all goodness, and, like the witches in "Macbeth" around the midnight caldron, exults with satanic mirth over the degradation of humanity. Many of Douglas Jerrold's witticisms are simply personal insults in the form of jests. What can be more brutal than his observation, when, at a dinner-party, one of the company, despite the variety, cried out: "Well, let others eat what they like, but calf's head say I." "That 's egotism," said Jerrold. The same may be said of many of the jests of the actor Foote, already referred to, who, with all his wit, must have been one of the nuisances of society. To the gift of sarcasm he added that of mimicry, and he kept these talents by him like a horse-pistol, to draw on the harmless and foolish, like a highwayman of his day on the road. It was the weak and helpless who were his favorite victims, not the strong and

self-reliant, like Dr. Johnson, who not only was ready to repay his sarcasms with compound interest, but threatened, if Foote mimicked him, to break his bones. One of Foote's characteristic insults, in the guise of jest, was his advice to the Duke of Norfolk of that day. On a masquerade night his Grace consulted the comic actor concerning the character he should appear in. "Don't go disguised," said Foote, "but assume a new character, — go sober." Foote could never forego his jest, even on the most solemn occasion. Having attended the funeral of Holland, the actor, whose father was a baker, — "Poor fellow!" he said in the Bedford that evening, "I have been to see him shoved into the family oven." It was one of the unpleasant traits of Laurence Sterne that he was fond of personalities. He made many enemies by his satirical sayings, and was astonished that men shrank from the edge, instead of being dazzled by the glitter, of his rapier-like wit.

The same may be said of Theodore Hook. He had both wit and humor, surprising readiness of invention, a genius for improvisation unequalled by that of any other Englishman, and, according to Lockhart, "an electrical felicity of pantomime" that made him as great an actor as could have been produced by rolling up Liston and Terry and Mathews into one. Hook once sat down at the piano and sang a song upon a company of sixty persons, each verse containing an epigram. Sheridan, who was present, was astounded at his extraordinary faculty. Being interrupted during an improvisation at his own house by the announcement of a servant, in undesigned rhythm, —

"Please, Mr. Winter has called for the taxes,"

Hook, undisturbed, rattled on: —

> "I advise you to give him whatever he axes;
> Mr. Winter's a man stands no sort of flummery,
> For though *Winter*'s his name, his process is *summary*."

Unhappily, though his comic gifts might have been a source of innocent pleasure, Hook's wit was generally malicious, and his humor satirical. "You could not help laughing," says R. H. Horne, "but were generally ashamed of yourself for having laughed. The objects of his satire were seldom the vices or follies of mankind, but generally their misfortunes or manners or unavoidable disadvantages, whether of a physical or an intellectual kind. A poor man with his mutton-bone was a rich meal for his comic Muse; and he was convulsed at the absurdity of high principles in rags, or at all needy. He never made fun of a lord." "He satirized," says Mr. Hannay, "in a truly vulgar spirit. . . . He was proud of the equivocal distinction he attained among the great, and, it is said, was inclined to swagger among his equals. The plush had eaten into his very soul. . . . His biographer observes that his funeral was ill attended by his great friends. But we need not wonder at that. A funeral is a well-known 'bore;' and, besides, the most brilliant wag cannot be amusing on the occasion of his own interment." We are not surprised to learn that such a person, on becoming a defaulter to the Government at Mauritius, and being compelled to return to England, could coolly jest upon his own financial misconduct, and say that his return was not exactly owing to ill-health, but to "something wrong in the *chest*." In his youth his propensity for ill-timed jesting burst forth before the Vice-chancellor of Oxford University, and nearly cost him his matriculation. When asked if he was prepared to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles, he promptly replied: "Oh yes, sir! quite ready; *Forty*, if you please."

Again, in what does the art of Talleyrand's repartees — which, strange to say, have been so lauded for their good-breeding — often consist but in so masking insolence in a play of words that the hearer laughs, and the victim finds no sympathy. When asked by a lady famous for her beauty and her stupidity how she should rid herself of some of her troublesome admirers, he replied: "You have only to open your mouth, madam." "It was your father, then, who was not handsome?" was one of his so-called brilliant retorts to a man who had spoken of his mother's beauty. Had the wit bluntly told his victim that he was ugly-looking, it would have been deemed a gross insult. To a person who squinted, and who had asked him how things were going in the political world, he replied: "As you see." This ruthless wit was sometimes the victim of sarcasms as personal and irritating as those with which he galled other men; as when Rewbell, exasperated by his opposition in council, flung an inkstand at his head, exclaiming: "Vil émigré, tu n'as pas le sens plus droit que le pied," — an incident to which Canning referred in his attack on "the lame artificer of fraud and lies," in the "New Morality."

Of a similar character to Talleyrand's are many of the acrid sayings of another brilliant French wit, Chamfort, some of whose *mots* have been attributed to that prince. His dry, caustic, sardonic observations burn, it has been said, the very paper on which they are written. To him all the things which men hold most sacred, — all the great springs of human action, all the noblest and tenderest sentiments of the human heart, — were but so many whetstones on which to sharpen the glittering blade of his wit. Living in aristocratic society, and seeing its hollowness, selfishness, and treachery; disgusted with the mockery of

the words "liberty" and "fraternity," which cut-throats were continually repeating, — he too hastily concluded that these were the characteristics of men in general, and declared that in seeing them the heart *must break or be bronzed.* That the latter was the effect on his own heart, his biting sarcasms sufficiently prove. Mephistopheles himself might envy the icy heartlessness of the glittering epigrams in which his cynicism was crystallized. "France," he said, "is a country in which it is always necessary to display one's vices, and always dangerous to disclose one's virtues." "The public, the public," he once exclaimed, "how many fools does it take to make a public?" In classifying friends, he divided them into "those who love us, those who are indifferent to us, and those who hate us." These stinging epigrams fairly represent the cold, hard, metallic glare of Chamfort's genius, — a genius of which mockery and scoffing were the ordinary manifestations, and which, softened by no kindly emotion, was devoid alike of all ennobling thought and of earnestness and sincerity.

Of all coarse and unfeeling personal jests, the most unpardonable are those which are aimed at physical defects and deformities. Beautifully says Fuller: "Scoff not at the natural defects of any which are not in their power to amend. Oh, it is cruelty to beat a cripple with his own crutches! Neither flout any for his profession, if honest, though poor and painful. *Mock not a cobbler for his black thumbs.*" Swift, in his "Verses on my own death," boasts that —

> "He abhorred that senseless tribe
> Who call it humor when they gibe.
> He spared a hump or crooked nose,
> Whose owners set not up for beaux.
> True dulness moved his pity,
> Unless it offered to be witty."

To what man with a heart as well as head does this example not commend itself? What can be more brutal, therefore, —

> "Si modo ego et vos
> Scimus inurbanum lepido seponere dicto," —

than the jests perpetrated by the "friends" of the poet Rogers on his cadaverous face, concerning which it was maintained by a wit that more "good things" had been said and written than on the looks of the greatest beauty? Ward, the author of "Tremaine," asked him why, now that he could afford it, he did not set up his hearse; and it was the same sympathizing companion who, when the poet repeated the couplet, —

> "The robin, with his furtive glance,
> Comes and looks at me askance," —

struck in with, "If it had been a carrion-crow, he would have looked you full in the face," — a sarcasm which, we are told, was greeted with shouts of laughter. Mackintosh wondered why, when at an election time he could not find accommodation at any hotel in a country town, he did not seek a snug lie down in the churchyard. Hook, meeting him at Lord Byron's funeral, gave him the friendly caution to keep out of sight of the undertaker, lest that functionary should claim him as one of his old customers. The "John Bull" newspaper published a story that when Rogers one night hailed a coach in St. Paul's Churchyard, the jarvey cried: "Ho! ho! my man, I 'm not going to be had that way; go back to your grave!"

Nearly all these sarcasms on the poet's physiognomy dropped from the lips or pens of men who were his professed friends and in the habit of sharing his hospitality at

the social board. It seems incredible that such coarse personalities should have been quoted and admired as legitimate wit; but we must remember that Rogers's own wit, which was in high repute, was sarcastic and bitter, and that no doubt many of the sarcasms indulged in at his expense were only in retaliation for his gibes and mockeries. His caustic humor became at one time so formidable that, it is said, his guests might be seen manœuvring which should leave the room last, so as not to undergo the dreaded ordeal; and it was said that he made his way in the world as Hannibal made *his* across the Alps, — with vinegar. Even Charles Lamb's wit, genial and kindly as it almost always was, occasionally transgressed the bounds of propriety. He was told one day of a man whose arms had been shot off in a sea-fight, and that as the poor wretch was lifted up to be carried to the cockpit, his legs were shot off also. "And did he live?" eagerly asked Lamb. "No," said the narrator. "What a pity!" said the melancholy wag; "he'd have been such an ornament to society!" Who does not feel ashamed of the laugh he is cheated into by such ghastly irony? We have spoken of the kindliness of Burns's humor. Genial, sunny, and sympathetic as it generally was, there were nevertheless a few occasions when it overstepped the boundary-line that separates legitimate from illegitimate fun. At a certain public-house a contest was proposed between a veteran rhymester, one Andrew Horner, and Burns, then a youth. Horner sat down and began: —

"In seventeen hunder thretty-nine," —

that being the year of his own birth, and his intention being to indulge in a little rhymed egotism. But the rhymes

resolutely refused to come; a stoup of whiskey gave him no inspiration; and so at last Burns, weary of waiting, finished the verse for him thus: —

> "In seventeen hunder thretty-nine
> The deil took stuff to make a swine,
> And set it in a corner;
> But afterward he changed his plan,
> And shaped it something like a man,
> And ca'ed it Andrew Horner."

How different from the wit of most of these men is that of Thomas Fuller! Blessed with a kindly, sunny nature, which his light, flaxen hair, blue and laughing eyes, and frank, open face, described by his contemporaries, did not belie, and with that happy buoyancy of spirit which, next to religion itself, is the most precious possession of man, he was utterly devoid of malice, and his wit, though sometimes unseasonable, never betrayed the slightest tincture of bitterness or spleen. Though he could be caustic enough if he chose, he never dipped his pen in "scorn's fiery poison." A sly irony, a merry, good-humored gibe, that tickles but does not sting, is all he ventures upon. Whatever subject he writes upon, there is a genial warmth and play about his humor, like that of sunbeams upon leaves. Another great humorist who never abused his gift, and who was distinguished from many of the great masters of ridicule by his grace, nobleness, and moral purity, was Addison. Thomson, in his "Winter," extols the accomplishments of Lord Chesterfield, and lauds especially —

> "That wit, the vivid energy of sense,
> The truth of Nature, which, with Attic point
> And kind, well-temper'd satire, smoothly keen,
> Steals through the soul, and without pain corrects."

Far happier would have been these lines if written of Addison. The one quality which pre-eminently distinguished his delicate and refined ridicule was what the Romans called *urbanitas*. Though a politician, and living in times of fierce party excitement and strife, though maligned by men whom he might have overwhelmed with his satire, yet he never dipped his pen in gall, or returned railing for railing. "If, as Soame Jenyns imagined," says Macaulay, "a portion of the happiness of seraphim and just men made perfect be derived from an exquisite perception of the ludicrous, their mirth must surely be none other than the mirth of Addison, — a mirth consistent with tender compassion for all that is frail, and with profound reverence for all that is sublime."

It is greatly to the credit of one of the most brilliant wits of this century, Sydney Smith, that, master as he was of raillery, ridicule, and satire in all their forms, he nobly used and rarely misused these powerful but dangerous and tempting weapons. The playful brightness of his jests cleared the social atmosphere, but the bolt rarely scathed. When the form of his jest betrayed levity, its spirit was generally serious and earnest. There was almost always a grave thought at the bottom, a thought worth remembering for its own sake, as well as for its brilliant vehicle. Though he loved to jest upon the harmless peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of his friends, yet it was always in a kindly spirit; and so well was this quality of comic exaggeration understood that he never gave offence to any of his associates in the whole course of his life. His jests upon Sir George Philips, when he visited him, were incessant; yet no one enjoyed them more than the benevolent baronet himself, who laughed at them almost to exhaustion.

On a few occasions he made a ludicrous use of Scriptural allusion which would have been inexcusable even if it had fallen from a layman's lips, — as when he illustrated his objections to always living in the country by saying that "he was in the position of the personage who, when he entered a village, straightway he found an ass;" when he described the critic, Mr. Croker, in the next world as "disputing with the recording angel as to the dates of his sins;" and pictured Sir George C. Lewis in Hades, "for ever and ever bookless, essayless, pamphletless, grammarless, in vain imploring the Bishop of London, seated aloft, for one little treatise on the Greek article, one smallest dissertation on the verb in μι." It has been said that a religious enthusiast was to the mirth-loving divine as strange and incomprehensible as an ornithorhynchus paradoxus; and hence it was that on another occasion he even more unjustifiably suffered his sense of the ridiculous to run away with his better feelings. It was when, in the "Edinburgh Review," in 1808, he held up the missionaries in India to derision, and in his rejoinder to Mr. Styles's reply claimed credit for exposing "a nest of consecrated cobblers," — referring to the noble, self-sacrificing Carey, who in his youth had been a cobbler. No brilliancy of wit could atone for such an outrage as this; and the satirist was the more inexcusable as he might have learned of the real character and labors of the missionaries from his brother Bobus, who had long been Advocate-General in Calcutta.

But it is not merely by excess that wit and humor may become offensive, there are some forms of them that are objectionable in themselves. Among the styles of jesting which have come into favor with modern comic writers, there is one, first cultivated to a large extent by Byron,

against which every lover of a pure and healthful literature should protest. I refer to the practice of yoking together the grave and the ludicrous, the mean and the exalted, in a way so incongruous as to startle by the contrast; in other words, of desecrating solemn or beautiful subjects by using them as materials for burlesque. The ambition of many of our popular writers to wring a jest out of the gravest materials, and to produce startling comic effects at any price, is one of the ugliest features of our literary times. There is a class of writers, prose and poetical, who produce their "effects" wholly in this way; who proceed habitually upon the principle of exerting their utmost skill to work up the feelings of the reader to a pitch of painful intensity, only that, by the sudden introduction of a ludicrous image or a line of bitter mockery, they may dispel at once, or scornfully insult, the emotion they have raised. Sometimes an elaborate poem is composed in a serious, sentimental, or romantic spirit, only that the structure may be knocked down by the last line. If the reader be cheated by the opening of such a performance, the closing antithesis, unless he have a vicious taste, is sure to disgust; if he remain cold to the sentiment, the whole point of the joke is lost.

Lord Byron, "the chartered libertine," who first engrafted this kind of poetry on the indigenous British stock from the Italian, had a marvellous talent for it, as the many masterpieces of levity and perverted sentiment in "Don Juan" will testify. By many these are considered as the most cogent proofs of his poetic power, displaying his wondrous mastery over the passions of the human heart, which he could thus at pleasure evoke or scatter. But we are disposed to believe, with an acute American critic, that such passages do little credit to his heart, if they do any

to his head, and serve only to cast ominous conjecture on the truth of his feelings. Thus the beautiful description of Haidee leaning over the sleeping Juan, one of the most exquisite pictures in modern British poetry, is sacrificed to the mocking demon of his wit: —

> "Like to an angel o'er the dying,
> Who die in righteousness, she leaned; and there
> All tranquilly the shipwrecked boy was lying,
> As o'er him lay the calm and stirless air.
> But Zoe meantime some eggs was frying;
> Since, after all, no doubt, the youthful pair
> Must breakfast, — and betimes, lest they should ask it,
> She drew out her provision from the basket."

Again, a fine, picturesque description of a rainbow winds up with a vulgar illustration from pugilism: —

> "A heavenly chameleon,
> The airy child of vapor and the sun,
> Brought forth in purple, cradled in vermilion,
> Baptized in molten gold, and swathed in dun,
> Glittering like crescent o'er a Turk's pavilion,
> And blending every color into one, —
> Just like a black eye in a recent scuffle;
> For sometimes we must box *without* the muffle."

Byron has been often praised for his wit; but if it was great, it was partly because it was rarely restrained by conscience, and it invaded sanctuaries into which the wit of others dared not enter.

Much of the peculiar genius of the German poet Heine is shown in similar ridiculous contrasts. It would be difficult to name another poet who knows so well as he how to build up a little edifice of the tenderest and most refined sentiments, for the mere pleasure of knocking it down with a last line. Approaching the reader with a doleful countenance, he pours into his ear a tale of secret

sorrow, and when the sympathies are enlisted, surprises his confidant with a horse-laugh.

Such mixtures of the grave with the grotesque, the pathetic with the farcical and the frivolous, it would be almost profane to dignify with the name of poetry. They are merely a species of literary sleight-of-hand, and bear about the same relation to genuine poetry that ginger-pop bears to champagne or hippocrene, or Grimaldi the clown to John Kemble the tragedian. They show a heart morally bankrupt, *blasé* to all profound emotion, which neither mocks nor can *be* mocked. There is at once a majesty that cannot be insulted, and an overpowering energy that may not be trifled with, in all the real emotions that stir the heart to its inmost depths, and arouse the highest faculties of the soul. He who can utter spells of a potency to raise such spirit-powers will not dare to flout them, but rather, like the enchantress of Endor, will stand overawed and appalled in their majestic presence. He who mocks the phantoms his art has raised, or seemed to raise, must stand convicted of being in league with only juggling fiends, that can but "palter in a double sense."

Among our American poets, Willis has been guilty of some sins of this kind; for example, he has a poem entitled "The Broken Bracelet," where a strain of tender sentiment touching the wearer concludes with the home question: —

"What 'll the fellow charge to mend?"

The imitations of this legerdemain by the small fry of rhymesters in the magazines and newspapers of the day are legion. But of all our real poets, the author of "Alnwick Castle" seems the most chargeable with the perversion of imagination and levity of feeling to which we have objected.

"A little laughing imp," says Mr. E. P. Whipple, "seems to sit opposite the fountain of his heart, and dispel with the merry flash of his eye every shade and thin essence which rises in misty beauty from its surface. . . . To produce a shock of surprise by the sudden intrusion of an incongruous idea into a mournful or sentimental flow of feeling, is but a little above the clap-trap of the stage. We are aware that in Halleck's case this is done in an inimitable manner, and that the effect upon one's risible faculties is irresistible; but still there are few who desire to be choked with a laugh at the very moment when the tears are starting from the eyes. It introduces a species of scepticism which is destructive to the enjoyment of poetry."

Another of the offensive forms which the perverted wit of the day assumes, is seen in the irreverent and profane jests which disgrace some of the daily newspapers. In their columns events of the saddest and most heart-rending character are announced in a flippant and mocking tone, and even made the occasion of a comic alliteration or a pun. A steamboat explosion, by which scores of human beings have been scalded to death, is heralded in jocose terms, and a railroad disaster which hurries its victims into eternity, and sends wretchedness into many homes, provokes an outburst of *jeux d'esprit*. The infliction of the death-penalty for crime, instead of solemnizing the thoughts of the journalist, is seized upon as an opportunity to display his ingenuity in comic alliteration or profane parody. A Western journal some years ago headed its account of the public execution of a professedly repentant murderer with the words "Jerked to Jesus" displayed in big letters at the top of the column. The same newspaper announced the supposed election of Mr. Tilden to the Presidency of the

United States with the heading, "Glory to God," and its subsequent doubt of that desired event with "Let us Pray." A Boston newspaper, not to be outdone by its Western contemporary, published the following: —

"It is said of a Chicago editor, who was very thankful for Tilden's election, that it took him nearly an hour to get down on his knees. He was n't used to it. First, he was inclined to stand on his head; then he put his elbows on the ground; but, finally, half a dozen of the boys got around, and planted him in the right attitude."

The attention of the readers of a New York city daily paper was one day arrested by the heading to a column, "Thy Will be Done!" Judge of the shock they received when on reading the article they learned that these words, which fell from the lips of the Divine Master in his moments of extreme agony, were used to express the calmness of a base-ball club on being defeated in a game! "Half-shell Piety" was for many weeks the habitual heading of a collection of irreverent jokes in a leading Western daily, which could find a stimulant to its wit only in mocking at the things which most men hold sacred. The same journal informed its readers one day that, "according to the outgoings of several eminent orthodox divines, such as Beecher, Swing, Thomas, and Farrar, the 'ell of hour hancestors has been de-sulphurized."

But enough. After reading such passages as we have quoted, one is tempted to ask: Has reason fled to brutish beasts? Is it true that a general spirit of frivolity, an utter incapacity for seriousness and reverence, is eating away the nobility and manliness of the American people? Are we becoming incapable of the devout and reverential fear which should be inspired by the thought of God, and of the awe

or horror which should be excited in our minds by the tragedies of human life? Certain we may be that if we continue thus to find in the gravest and most solemn themes only an occasion for jesting and merriment, the time will come when we shall have nothing to venerate, no great men to reverence, no institutions to honor. We shall then, in our hour of peril, cry aloud for our hero, but he will not come. We shall go down in confusion and ruin, because the race of great men will have died out.

Another illegitimate use of wit, too common to-day, is the practice of applying passages from the Scriptures to trivial or ludicrous events. There is nothing easier than to provoke a laugh by grotesquely associating a secular event with the language of the Bible. It is a kind of wit which is as cheap as it is dreary. When, aside from its divine origin, we think simply of the literary, historical, and ethical character of this book, which for thousands of years has held all civilized nations spell-bound; that it was written, during a period of sixteen centuries, in Palestine, under the shadow of the Pyramids, on the banks of the Euphrates, in the Arabian desert, on the isle of Patmos, in classic Greece, and in imperial Rome; that it recites events antedating all others recorded by man; that its Muse was vocal before Homer, and its ethics were promulgated before Thales and Pythagoras; that States have been founded on its principles; that the very translations of it, which have been made into hundreds of tongues, have fixed languages and settled the idioms of speech; above all, when we reflect that "it contains the spiritual biography of every human heart," and, using all the forms of literary composition, is suited alike to the king and the beggar, the philosopher and the child, quickening and stim-

ulating the religious life of men beyond all other books, — how inexcusable must we regard the levity which employs its language as material for jests! Rightly did Dr. Johnson, over a century ago, pronounce this "a mode of merriment which a good man dreads for its profaneness, and a witty man disdains for its easiness and vulgarity." Thomas Fuller loved every form of innocent wit as fondly as any man in any age; but he was shocked by jests which tended to destroy men's reverence for anything sacred. "Jest not," says he, "with the two-edged sword of God's word. Will nothing please thee to wash thy hands in but the font, or to drink healths in but the church chalice?"

Of profane jests Fuller says: "If the profaneness may be severed from the wit, it is like a lamprey: take out the string in the back, it may make good meat." Possibly; but in the great majority of cases it will be found, I fear, that the residuum of wit left after the separation is microscopically small.

Shall we consider it an abuse of wit, "an unmannerly *crepitus ingenii*," as Fuller has it, when it sparkles on the lips of the dying? Not necessarily, I think. Shakspeare, in "Love's Labor 's Lost," makes Biron say that

"Mirth cannot move a soul in agony:"

yet the ruling passion is said to be strong in death; and if so, why should we be surprised if in his last hours a pleasantry should escape from the lips of one in whom humor has been all his life the strongest faculty? Would we have men play the hypocrite then? The great and good Sir Thomas More jested on the scaffold. It had been clumsily erected, and shook as he placed his foot upon the ladder; so, as he mounted to the block, he said mer-

rily: "Master Lieutenant, I pray you see me safe up; and for my coming down, let me shift for myself." Forced gravity in one's last hours, contradictory to the known character, would give juster occasion for complaint or suspicion than habitual vivacity, which only superficial observers can mistake for thoughtlessness or insensibility. When Heine, in his last illness, in reply to his doctor, who asked him one day when he was almost at his last gasp: "Pouvez-vous siffler?" (*siffler* means both "to whistle" and "to hiss") whispered: "Hélas! non, pas même une comédie de M. Scribe!" the witticism was in keeping with his life-long character. So when Moreau, the victor of Hohenlinden, wrote to his wife after he had been mortally wounded, in 1813: "At the battle of Dresden, three days ago, I had both legs carried off by a cannon-ball. That rascal Bonaparte is always fortunate." If we are shocked by the dying jests of Richelieu's buffoon, the ecclesiastic, actor, wit, and profligate, Boisrobert, who dropped into the grave with a crucifix in his hand, unbelief in his heart, and an irreverent repartee on his tongue; or by the fearfully profane pun with which, it is said, Rabelais thought fit to expire, after he had caused a domino to be brought and put over his shoulders: "Beati sunt qui moriuntur in Domino," — let us remember that men die as they have lived, and that their sin was in so living as to make possible such dying jests.

To conclude, as wit is so often abused, as well as so often misunderstood, is it a blessing or a curse to its possessor? Is it a kind or a malign fairy that bestows this gift on a child at its birth? It is evident that priceless as is the value of wit to the world, it often proves a hiltless sword to him who uses it. Dull people look with suspicion

on the witty man or the humorist who startles them out of their complacency, and who too often prefers even to give offence rather than forego a good hit. Again, while wit is not necessarily connected with ill-nature, yet it is often joined with that irritability of genius of which it may become the most effective weapon. It has been said with truth that half the tendencies of our nature pass into habits only from the facilities which encourage their development. Quarrels were infinitely more frequent when all men were accustomed to wear arms; and, similarly, many a waspish nature has become doubly irritable from being in possession of the weapon of satire. It is said of Canning that, betrayed by his power of sarcasm, he rarely delivered an important speech without making an enemy for life. A comic alliteration, a ludicrous combination of words, occurring to him was a temptation he could not resist. Though his party were ready enough to use his extraordinary gift of satire, it yet tended rather to hinder than to hasten his own political advancement. Long before Canning's day Swift had written of another man with the same gift: "The conjecture that he has dealt in satire, both in prose and verse, *has been an absolute bar to his rising in the world.*" It was his own wit, as manifested in the "Tale of a Tub," and in his lampoon on Queen Anne's favorite, the Duchess of Somerset, that kept from the coveted bishopric Temple's snubbed and insulted secretary, who must have often cursed the day when he allowed his love of satire to cheat him of the rewards due to his genius.

The sarcastic Pasquin, if we may believe Brantôme, paid dearly for one of his jests. Before Sixtus V. was elevated to the pontiff's chair, his sister had been a laundress; so

Pasquin appeared one morning in a dirty shirt, and when asked the reason, replied that his washerwoman had become a princess. The Pope offered to pay the author ten thousand crowns, and to spare his life, if he would discover himself. The thoughtless satirist took the bait and got the money; but Sixtus ordered that his right hand should be cut off, "so that it might never again write scandalous words." John Owen, the epigrammatist, who was always troubled with "the poet's disease," indigence, forfeited by a jest a legacy which might have made him comfortable, if not affluent, for life. In one of his satirical distichs, which the reader will find in the subsequent chapter on "Epigrams," he scoffed at the Catholic religion, which so incensed an uncle, from whom he was expecting a legacy, that his relative struck his name out of his will, — "which was the reason," says Wood, "that he ever after lived in a poor condition." Another Englishman, Sir Thomas Warton, once paid a dear price for a joke. On one occasion a Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, who was not remarkable for wisdom, while reading the service came to Psalm lxix. 5, "Lord, thou knowest my simpleness." Warton, who sat below him, whispered, "Why, that is known to everybody." Soon afterward the office of Master became vacant, and Warton was obliged to canvass this man for the casting-vote. The answer he received was, "No, I am not so simple as that, neither;" and Warton lost his election. Everybody knows how Macaulay exasperated the Evangelicals, and lost his re-election to Parliament, by his sarcastic mention of the "bray" of Exeter Hall, and "the prescriptive right of its frequenters to talk nonsense."

There is another reason why the gift of wit tends to bar success in life. The world is a jealous world, and rarely

awards the palm in more than one line of excellence to the same competitor. It will not admit that a man can have both wit and sound judgment, humor and good sense. On the other hand, there have been cases of wits who by the exercise of their gift have won great advantage to themselves. James Smith, one of the witty authors of the "Rejected Addresses," sent one day to Mr. Strahan, the King's printer, who was suffering from gout and old age, though his mental faculties were unimpaired, the following epigram. Thereupon the gratified old gentleman made a codicil to his will, by which he bequeathed to the doubtless astonished epigrammatist, who could no longer speak of his "addresses" as "rejected," three hundred pounds: —

> "Your lower limbs seemed far from stout,
> When last I saw you walk;
> The cause I presently found out,
> When you began to talk.
> The power that props the body's length,
> In due proportion spread,
> In you mounts upward, and the strength
> All settles in the head."

For this verse the lucky Smith received exactly £37 10*s.* per line, — higher pay, it has been said, than any other poet has received for his verses since the Venetian Senate awarded four hundred gold pieces to Sannazarius for his celebrated epigram, "De Mirabile Urbe Venitiis."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOGIC OF WIT.

Nor trenchant words, nor martyr flames,
Can do away that ancient lie;
A greater death shall falsehood die,
Shot through and through with cunning words.

TENNYSON.

With what a sharp-provided wit he reasons!

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN and how far is ridicule justifiable in controversy? When may a disputant be permitted to place his opponent's views in a comic light, and show that the conclusions which he seeks to establish are not only unsupported by facts and logical reasoning, but laughable? Some years ago a British review, protesting against the introduction of comic writing into serious discussion, complained of Professor Goldwin Smith's Historical Lectures as illustrating the mischievous extent to which the practice is carried in the polemic literature of the day, and the way in which, amid the coruscations of wit, the telling ring of a well-poised sentence, or the keen lightning of a skilfully directed sarcasm, the real merits of an argument are often lost sight of, and the controversy fought out on false grounds, with erroneous premises or illogical conclusions. In reply to this it was contended, by a London literary journal, that the protest against ridicule in controversy is simply the cry of the victim of a merited castigation. The

very symptoms of distress, it was added, prove the utility of the punishment; and when a bad thing is also an absurd thing, the cause of truth is best subserved by calling attention to its absurdity in the most telling way.

The truth, it seems to us, lies midway between these extremes. There are doctrines and opinions against which ridicule, irony, banter, raillery, satire, sarcasm, — all the weapons of wit, — may not only be legitimately employed, but which merit no other refutation. They should be held up to derision and contempt in every way which experience shows to be most efficacious. Nor can such a mode of attack be justly taxed with levity or insolence; for, as Milton justly says, "even this vein of laughing (as I could produce out of grave authors) hath ofttimes a grave and sinewy force in confuting; . . . if it be harmful to be angry, and withal to cast a lowering smile, when the properest object calls for both, it will be long ere any will be able to say why those two most rational faculties of human intellect, anger and laughter, were first seated in the breast of man." Again, if it be admitted that wit is a *power*, for good or evil, in controversy, that very admission legitimizes its use. The infidel, the scoffer, the enemy of virtue and righteousness, the advocate of falsehood, we may be sure, will not hesitate to use this weapon; and shall they have a monopoly of its advantages? Even the grim Augustine saw this. "Who," he asks, "would venture to say that truth ought to stand disarmed against falsehood, or that the enemies of the faith shall be at liberty to frighten the faithful with hard words, and jeer at them with lively sallies of wit, while the Catholics ought never to write except with a coldness of style enough to set the reader asleep?" There are times when all the forces of truth must be pressed

into the field, — the light-armed as well as the heavy-armed, — and they must both use their own weapons. A stripling may sometimes slay a giant with a pebble and a sling. The disposition to gag the lips of wit and humor very often, we may suspect, masks a design to hold back the light from revealing errors and abuses which the gaggers desire to hide. "These things are very dusty, — look, look!" said a mistress, rebuking her servant-girl for not dusting the furniture. "If you please, ma'am," said the girl, "it's not things that's dirty, but it's that nasty sun that comes in and shows the dust on things." It must be remembered, also, that a man sometimes has opponents of so contemptible a character that, as Milton says, no defence can properly be used "but either the slap or the spurn." "If they can afford me none but a ridiculous adversary," he says of the party against which he was once contending, "the blame belongs not to me, though the whole dispute be strewed and scattered with ridiculous."

It is when "this vein of laughing," as Milton says, "hath a strong and sinewy force in confuting," that it is justifiable and useful in controversy and other writing. The affinity of wit to reasoning is shown by the fact that the effect produced on the mind by some witticisms is closely akin to that produced by subtle reasoning, and that there are persons whose delight in such reasoning always manifests itself in merriment. Thus George Eliot, speaking in one of her letters of a purely argumentative work which she had been reading, says: "The book is full of wit to me. It gives me that exquisite kind of laughter which comes from the gratification of the reasoning faculties." It has been observed that some of Johnson's finest witticisms consist in the suggestion of an analogy that immediately

exposes the absurdity of an action or a proposition, and that it is only their ingenuity, condensation, and instantaneousness which lift them from reasoning into wit; they are reasoning raised to a higher power. There is a logic of wit which is not only terser, but more convincing, than the most elaborate argumentation. A volume of reasoning may be condensed into a keen retort or an epigram, and the absurdity of a statement or an argument may be exposed by an impromptu jest more effectually than by a series of syllogisms. There are cases, especially in debate, where a joke is a happy summary, a trenchant compendium of long argumentative processes. It flashes conviction upon you with the suddenness and illuminating power of lightning; it causes the truth, which was previously obscured, and is now suddenly visible, to penetrate into your being. When, for example, in reply to the demand that England should "put her foot down" at once in several quarters of the globe, a speaker in the House of Commons submitted that "England is not a centipede," could an hour's speech have better exposed the fallacy? Above all is wit the most deadly agent for the destruction of sophistry. To meet an absurd fallacy with reasoning, is not only to employ a tedious method, but to do it too much honor. Let it be "speared with a jest," riddled with all the "rash dexterity of wit," hung quivering on the point of a sharp retort, and you not only treat the sophism as it deserves, but you economize time. Another advantage of this wit-logic is that from its brevity and vividness it is remembered longer than grave reasoning; the hearer, as Horace says of the victim of poetic flattery: —

> "Discit enim citius meminitque libentius illud
> Quod quis deridet, quam quod probat et veneratur."

It was a conviction of this that led William Pitt to say that "all wit is true reasoning;" and the poet Rogers, who has preserved the saying, to add, that "wit is truth." The Comte de Maistre, who had in a remarkable degree what Sainte-Beuve calls the gift *de faire rire en raisonnant*, finely observes that "reason is naturally but slightly penetrative; it does not easily make its way; it needs to be armed, so to speak, with the terrible epigram. The French wit punctures like the needle, to make way for the thread" ("La pointe française pique comme l'aiguille, pour faire passer le fil"). Milton, speaking of Plato's dialogues, notes particularly the mirth-provoking effect of the reasoning on the reader. "There is scarce one of them," he says, "especially wherein some notable sophister lies sweating and turmoiling under the inevitable and merciless dilemmas of Socrates, but he that reads, were it Saturn himself, would be robbed of more than a smile." Horne Tooke furnishes a happy example of the logic of wit in his reply to a person who contended that a man should be a landowner to qualify him to vote at political elections or to be a legislator. "How many acres," asked Tooke, "make a man a *wise*acre?" Equally felicitous was Sydney Smith when, replying to the popular objections to female education, he declared that he had all his life been so ignorant as never to have known the advantages of ignorance. Hooker tells us that "some persons think that they cannot admire as they ought the power and authority of the word of God if in things divine they should attribute any force to man's reason; for which cause they never use reason so willingly as to disgrace reason. . . . As if reason were an enemy unto religion, childish simplicity the mother of ghostly and divine wisdom." When Samuel

Fiske, a witty Connecticut clergyman, was examined by a council before his ordination as a Congregational minister, he was asked, as a crucial test of the soundness of his theology, whether, in the Scriptural case of the man with the withered limb, the man healed himself, or the Lord healed him. "Well," replied Mr. Fiske, "I always supposed the man *had a hand in it*," — a reply of which the theology is as faultless as the wit.

At a trial for murder by poisoning, held forty years ago in Maine, George Evans, counsel of the accused, asked Dr. Hill, a witness, if prussic acid was not sometimes spontaneously evolved from the human stomach. "I don't know," dryly answered the doctor; "but if it be so, it must be very dangerous to have a stomach." An hour's explanation could not more effectually have refuted the theory, which received its death-blow amid roars of laughter, in which the jury joined. One of Dryden's tragedies was overwhelmed with ridicule during its performance at the theatre by a logical witticism of the Duke of Buckingham, which the poet afterward avenged in his masterly portrait of Zimri. When the actress had to speak the following line, she assumed, according to Spence, a moving and affecting tone, which she deemed appropriate to the sentiment, and then slowly repeated: —

"My wound is great, because it is so small."

Thereupon, with a terrible look of distress, she paused. Buckingham, rising immediately from his seat, added in a loud, mimicking voice: —

"Then 't would be greater were it none at all."

The effect, we are told, was electrical. The actress was hissed off the stage, and the play was never performed

again. How felicitously and tersely Douglas Jerrold, whose acid jests show him to have been a wit, if not of the first water, at least of the first vinegar, characterized Miss Martineau's atheistical book, when he said that the sum of its doctrine was contained in the formula, "There is no God, and Miss Martineau is his prophet!" Hood affords an occasional example of wit-logic, as when he says that "slamming the door angrily is a wooden oath;" and when in his "Ode to Rae Wilson" he declares that, —

> "A man may cry Church! Church! at ev'ry word,
> With no more piety than other people;
> A daw 's not reckon'd a religious bird
> Because it keeps a-cawing from a steeple."

How admirably a certain class of critics, who, though blind to the excellences of a book, a building, or a painting, have the eye of a lynx for petty, microscopic faults, are burlesqued in the fable of the beetle that crawled across the pavement of St. Paul's cathedral! "No," he sententiously and with a Sir Oracle air remarked, "he could not at all approve of the architecture of the building; there were far too many cracks in the pavement, and his legs fell into them."

The logic of wit is the most destructive logic that is employed against error. It annihilates shams, and dashes down towering structures of sophistical reasoning at a blow. Among all the elaborate arguments against the Southern doctrine of "secession," is there one which exposes its fallacy more vividly and conclusively than the comment of a Cincinnati newspaper on a "State's rights" address in that city, by one Corry? "A lisping cockney," says the writer, "in reply to the question: 'Why does a dog wag its tail?' replied: 'You thee the dog waggeth hith tail

becauth the dog ith stwonger than the tail. If he wathn't, the tail would waggle the dog.' Mr. Corry and other State's-rights gentlemen want a tail constructed with a dog attached to it, — a government in which the tail shall be strong enough to 'waggle the head.'" It is said John Wilkes was once asked by a Roman Catholic: "Where was your Protestant Church before Luther?" "Did you wash your face this morning?" asked Wilkes. "I did, sir." "Then where was your face before it was washed?" retorted Wilkes. In the old mediæval times Satan was grotesquely depicted, and the nursery abounded with frightful tales of his digestive powers. It is said that as Cuvier was walking one day near Avernus, a repulsive personage met him and demanded his worship. "No, I will not worship you," said the naturalist. "Then I will eat you," rejoined the demon. Cuvier eyed him deliberately, and exclaimed in a tone of mingled contempt and triumph: "Horns and cloven feet, — *graminivorous. You eat me? Nonsense!*" "Is it not right," said a gentleman, advocating the justice and propriety of a hereditary nobility, "that, in order to hand down to posterity the virtues of those who have been eminent for their services to their country, their posterity should enjoy the honors conferred on them as a reward for such services?" "By the same rule," replied a lady, "if a man is hanged for his misdeeds, all his posterity should be hanged too," — a *reductio ad absurdum* estopping all rejoinder. Hardly less happy was the distinction made by a Scottish advocate who, as he was limping down High Street in Edinburgh, overheard a young lady say to her companion: "That is Mr. C ——, the lame lawyer." Turning round, he said: "No, madam; I am a lame man, but not a lame lawyer."

How sententiously and how effectually Ennius, the old Roman poet, demolishes the pretensions of fortune-tellers, "qui sui questus causa fictas suscitant sententias!" —

> "Qui sibi semitam non sapiunt, alteri monstrant viam;
> Quibus divitias pollicentur, ab iis drachmam petunt:
> *De divitiis deducant drachmam, reddant cetera.*"

That is: "They who know not the way for themselves, point it out to others. Of the persons to whom they promise riches, they seek for a drachma. *Let them deduct the drachma from those riches, and hand over the balance.*"

One of the masters of the logic of wit in his day was Erasmus. In his "Colloquies" and "Praise of Folly" he lashed the monks, who then swarmed in Europe, and the bigots and ignoramuses of his day, with a merciless ridicule; but it was in his "Ciceronianus" that his wit-logic was most powerfully manifested. The work was written to expose the pedantry and folly of a small knot of scholars who prided themselves on their close and exclusive imitation of the style of Cicero in writing Latin. So far did they carry this whimsical idolatry that they not only refused to employ a word or phrase not sanctioned by the Roman orator, but they would not express even Christian ideas except by heathenish terminology, and consequently failed often to express them at all. The dialogue in which Erasmus shows up the folly of these pedants overflows with humor as well as learning, and sweeps away the nonsense against which it is directed with resistless sarcasm. The absurdity of trying to express modern thoughts on literature, politics, or religion, by a slavish adherence to the phraseology of one who had never had such thoughts, is shown with overwhelming force of witty argument and argumentative wit.

There is perhaps no argumentative work in the English language more devoid of a gleam of wit than Butler's "Analogy." A stroke of satire in its pages would startle one as much as a jest on a gravestone or in a ledger. Yet Henry Rogers thinks that Butler, with all his gravity, "is by no means without that dry sort of humor which often accompanies vigorous logic, and is in some sense inseparable from it; for the neat detection of a sophistry, or the sudden and unexpected explosion of a fallacy, produces much the same effect as wit on those who are capable of enjoying close and cogent reasoning. There is a kind of simple, grave, satirical pleasantry, with which he sometimes states and refutes an objection, by no means without its piquancy." But it is in that great master of syllogistic reasoning, Chillingworth, that oftener, perhaps, than in any other English writer, one meets with those "sudden and unexpected explosions of a fallacy that produce on the acute reader much the same effect as wit." Take, as an example, the following from his "Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation." His Jesuit opponent, after striving to show that "the Scripture cannot be judge of controversies," and that private individuals cannot be allowed to interpret the Scripture for themselves, but must accept the interpretation of the infallible (that is, the Roman) Church, had proceeded to cite passages of Scripture to prove the doctrine of the Church's infallibility; upon which Chillingworth, detecting with unerring instinct the vulnerable point in the Jesuit's reasoning, thus replies: —

"For God's sake, sir, tell me plainly: in those texts which you allege for the infallibility of your Church, do not you allow what sense you think true, and disallow the contrary? and do you not this by the direction of your private reason? If you do, why do

you condemn it in others? If you do not, I pray you tell me what direction you follow, or whether you follow none at all? If none at all, this is like drawing lots, or throwing the dice, for the choice of a religion; if any other, I beseech you tell me what it is. Perhaps you will say, 'The Church's authority;' and that will be to dance finely in a round, thus: to believe the Church's infallible authority, because the Scriptures avouch it, and to believe that the Scriptures say and mean so, because they are so expounded by the Church. Is not this for a father to beget his son, and the son to beget his father; for a foundation to support the house, and the house to support the foundation? Would not Campian have cried out at it, *Ecce quos gyros, quos Mæandros?* And to what end was this going about, when you might as well at first have concluded the Church infallible, because she says so, as thus to put in Scripture for a mere stale, and to say the Church is infallible because the Scripture says so, and the Scripture means so, because the Church says so, which is infallible? Is it not evident, therefore, to every intelligent man that you are enforced to do that yourself which so tragically you declaim against in others? The Church, you say, is infallible; I am very doubtful of it: how shall I know it? The Scripture, you say, affirms it, as in the 59th of Esay [Isaiah]: 'My spirit that is in thee,' etc. Well, I confess that I find there these words; but I am still doubtful whether they be spoken of the Church of Christ; and if they be, whether they mean as you pretend. You say the Church says so, which is infallible. Yes; but that is the question, and therefore not to be begged, but proved: neither is it so evident as to need no proof; otherwise, why brought you this text to prove it? What, then, remains, but that you say, reasons drawn out of the circumstances of the text will convince that this is the sense of it? Perhaps they will; but reasons cannot convince me, unless I judge of them by my reason; and for every man or woman to rely on that in the choice of their religion, and in the interpreting of Scripture, you say is a horrible absurdity; and therefore must neither make use of your own in this matter, nor desire me to make use of it."

Dr. Johnson had a remarkable power of smashing by his epigrammatic wit the "thin egg-shells of conceit" and

sophistry. He was a terrible enemy of shams and bores. As George Dawson has well said, whenever he met with a man stuffed, he took him up at once, as a child takes up its doll, and shook the bran out of him. All readers of Boswell know how blunt and dogmatic he was in conversation, and with how little ceremony fools and dreaming sentimentalists were annihilated by the resistless battery of his wit. That wit sprang from a quick penetration of mind, which detected at a glance the weak spot in an opponent's armor, and struck at that spot with a giant's strength. In keen argument, rapid flashes of humor, scornful and crushing retort, and dexterous sophistry, he had no match. Sometimes he would fell his adversary at a blow; his sword, as Boswell said, would be through your body in an instant, before you had time to parry. "Sir," said he, of certain advocates of equality, "your levellers wish to level *down* as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling *up* to themselves." To one who quoted from Brooke's "Gustavus Vasa" the sentiment, —

> "Who rules o'er freemen should himself be free,"

Johnson replied: —

> "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat."

When was more aqua-fortis condensed into a sarcasm than in his memorable denunciation of Bolingbroke: "Sir, he was a scoundrel and a coward: a scoundrel, for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality; a coward, because he had not the resolution to fire it off himself, but left half-a-crown to a beggarly Scotchman to draw the trigger after his death!" Johnson's talk had the merit of being at once playful and potent; "its playfulness resembling the ricochetting of sixty-eight pounders, which bound

like rubber-balls, yet batter down fortresses." Not unlike Johnson in his mingled ruggedness and playfulness, in his powerful and vivid grasp of the logic of a limited subject, which enabled him to close a tightly linked argument with a knock-down illustration replete with wit and force, was the late Archbishop Whately. The author of a multitude of grave works on theology, political economy, logic, and rhetoric, he was yet one of the greatest jokers of his day, and of his riddles, puns, and conundrums there was no end. It is in his apt, vivid, and clinching illustrations, at once wit and argument, that his logical power is most signally seen. Thus, criticising the demand for gratitude to Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington for granting Catholic Emancipation and Free-Trade, as measures of necessity, after they had resisted them to the last possible moment, Whately asks: "Who could suppose them [the Irish] such fools as to be grateful to those who granted what they lacked power to refuse, and who never even attempted to make a virtue of necessity, but always proclaimed that it was by force and against their will? *One might as well be grateful to an ox for a beef-steak.*" The Irish Poor Law he described as setting a starved dog to eat his own tail. Again, speaking of the menacing attitude of the Radical toward the Irish Protestant Church, and of the worldly attitude of purely political Protestants toward it, the archbishop says: "As for these last, I regard them and the Radicals as only two different kinds of enemies to the Protestant Church. They are like the Asiatic and African hunters of the elephant: the latter wish to kill the elephant for the ivory and as much flesh as they can carry off, leaving the rest of his carcass as a scramble for hyenas and vultures; the others wish to catch and keep him for a drudge."

Of tradition he says, that to found faith on an appeal to it, is "to base it on *the report of a report of a report of a report.*" Again, to interpret the Scriptures by the writings of the ancient Fathers "is as if a naturalist should take a fossil elephant as a standard by which to correct and modify the description of the animal now existing among us." To a person who had offended him by a display of self-conceit, Whately once said: "Sir, you are one of the first men of the age." "Oh, my lord," replied his unsuspecting victim, "you do me too much honor!" "Not at all," was the reply; "you were born, I believe, in 1801."

One of the greatest masters of the logic of wit in recent times was Colonel Perronet Thompson, a Liberal of the old school, who for some years was joint editor with Dr. Bowring of the "Westminster Review." His written style was remarkable for vigor and pith, and his speeches, both in and out of Parliament, were as sententious and suggestive as his writings. How clever is his definition of a Radical: "One that knows his ills, and goes to work the right way to remove them. Every man is a Radical who shuts his mouth to keep out flies. Does any man go to a doctor and ask for a cure that is not radical? All men have been Radicals that ever did any good since the world began. Adam was a Radical when he cleared the first place from rubbish for Eve to spin in. Noah was a Radical when, hearing the world was to be drowned, he went about such a common-sense proceeding as making for himself a ship to swim in. An antediluvian Whig would have laid together half a dozen sticks for an ark, and called it a virtual representation." In one of his impassioned and powerful philippics against the modern slave propagandists among his

aristocratic countrymen, Mr. Thompson said that they were yielding to inexorable necessity as to the certainty of emancipation in the United States, and they only begged for mercy to the extent that it should be done gradually. The absurdity of this he thus ludicrously exposed: —

"Set it down once for all, that wherever a return to justice is to be made, the first suffering is the least. Doing the thing gradually is only doing the thing over and over. When the game was felt to be up with the English corn-laws, there was a great outcry for gradual abolition; and a story did more than anything else to turn it into a joke. An aristocratic colonel, the subject of many friendly memories, had a dog of a kind it is the cruel custom to deprive of its tail; and he gave it to his dragoon servant, with an intimation that it was to be done. Some time afterward a frightful howling seemed to say the thing was over; but the next week the colonel was surprised with the repetition of the cries. He let it pass, however, till a third time put him out of patience, and in heat he summoned the executioner to his presence. 'What *are* you doing with that unhappy dog?' 'Sir,' replied the subordinate, with his military salute and native brogue, 'I thought the poor *cratur* could not bear it all at once, so I cut off a little at a time.'"

Coleridge, who was not a formal logician, yet excelled in the logic of wit. In his "Literary Remains" he thus wittily exposes what he regards as the fallacy of certain theologians who have no idea of the power of *cumulative proof*. "Give them proof-texts of a doctrine to any amount, and they will meddle with only one at a time, and nibble them successively all away, like mice nibbling at the successive strands of a cable. 'One text at a time!' 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!'—and in this way they go on pulling out hair by hair from the horse's tail (say, rather, dreaming that they do so), and then conclude with a shout that the horse never had a tail! For why?

This hair is not a tail, nor that, nor the third; and how can all do what none of all does?"

The wit of Macaulay is often keenly logical. He has no command of artful, biting insinuation or delicate raillery, but sums up his arguments in terse and powerful antithesis. Antithesis, which is usually the soul of wit, is, in some form, his favorite mode of expression, and is often pushed to paradox; his pages are illuminated, not only by little sparks, but by broad flashes of this figure. There is hardly a noble passage in his Essays or in his Speeches that does not owe its pungency or power to this vivid perception and statement of contraries. He delights also in epigrams, and the force of his antithesis is often increased by its epigrammatic point. Thus he says: "The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. Indeed, he generally contrived to enjoy the double pleasure of tormenting both spectator and bear." Of Barère he says: "As soon as he ceases to write trifles, he begins to write lies; and such lies! A man who has never been within the tropics does not know what a thunder-storm means; a man who has never looked on Niagara has but a faint idea of a cataract; and he who has not read Barère's Memoirs may be said not to know what it is to lie." What can be more piquant than Macaulay's account of the defeat of Lord Galway in Spain, — "a man who was in war what Molière's doctors were in medicine; who thought it much more honorable *to fail* according to rule, than *to succeed* by innovation. . . . This great commander conducted the campaign of 1707 in the most scientific manner. On the plains of Almanza he encountered the army of the Bourbons. He drew up his troops according to the methods prescribed by the best writers, and in a

few hours lost eighteen thousand men, a hundred and twenty standards, all his baggage, and all his artillery."

But of all the masters of the logic of wit in our times, Sydney Smith was the Coryphæus. His exquisite humor was but the intense expression, the quintessence, of reason and good sense. The service he did for Catholic Emancipation, in his "Letters of Peter Plymley," is familiar to all. They purported to be written by Peter Plymley to his brother Abraham, a parson living in the country; and under the plea of enlightening the mind of that innocent parochial personage, they contained a brilliant commentary on the doings of the ministry and the pet arguments and prejudices of their fellow-Conservatives. Never were "the fears of the brave and the follies of the wise" more pitilessly uncovered and held up to derision. With intermingled wit, irony, and logic, — with his favorite weapons of the *argumentum ad hominem* and the *reductio ad absurdum*, — he pressed the cause of Emancipation in almost every conceivable form; and though written to refute the local absurdities of the time, the "Letters" remain to-day the ablest exposition of the never-dying principles of toleration to be found in our language. "Ah, Mr. Smith," said an Irish priest to him one day, "you have such a way of putting things!" In the art of "putting things," of stripping off all the disguises of specious language, and presenting a case in its naked truth, he never was surpassed. "He drives a slippery antagonist to his last wiggle, a windy one to his last gasp, by insisting on their saying what they mean. . . . The rhetorician finds that his color-box is gone; the polemic, with linstock lighted, that his powder has been damped." As it is not easy to laugh and be angry, the public simply chuckled at freedoms

which, in an austerer garb, they would have condemned. Smith's favorite mode of reasoning was to admit his adversary's principle, and then show its absurdity by pushing it to its extremest consequences. The best way of answering a bad argument, he says in his article on "Spring-Guns and Man-Traps," is not to stop it, but to let it go on its course till it leaps over the boundaries of common-sense. The fallacious reasoning of those who contended that that was not a fit time for emancipating the Catholics, that a period of universal war was not the proper season for "dangerous innovations in the Constitution," is thus ludicrously and triumphantly exposed: —

"Here is a frigate attacked by a corsair of immense strength and size, rigging cut, masts in danger of coming by the board, four-foot water in the hold, men dropping off very fast; in this dreadful situation how do you think the captain acts (whose name shall be Perceval)? He calls all hands upon deck, talks to them of king, country, glory, sweethearts, gin, French prison, wooden shoes, Old England, and hearts of oak; they give three cheers, rush to their guns, and, after a tremendous conflict, succeed in beating off the enemy. Not a syllable of all this; this is not the manner in which the honorable commander goes to work. The first thing he does is to secure twenty or thirty of his prime sailors, who happen to be Catholics, to clap them in irons, and set over them a guard of as many Protestants. Having taken this admirable method of defending himself against his infidel opponents, he goes upon deck, reminds the sailors, in a very bitter harangue, that they are of different religions; exhorts the Episcopal gunner not to trust to the Presbyterian quartermaster; issues positive orders that the Catholics should be fired at upon the first appearance of discontent; rushes through blood and brains, examining his men in the Catechism and Thirty-nine Articles, and positively forbids every one to sponge or ram who has not taken the sacrament according to the Church of England. Was it right to take out a captain

made of excellent British stuff, and to put in such a man as this? Is not he more like a parson, or a talking lawyer, than a thorough-bred seaman? And built as she is of heart of oak, and admirably manned, is it possible, with such a captain, to save this ship from going to the bottom?"

So instinctive is Sydney Smith's perception of an error that he will stamp out the life of a time-honored sophism by a single foot-note. Even his parenthesis is terrible, — "a mere tapping on the ear, in passing, that smites like the sail of a windmill." While driving on with his main argument, he will contrive indirectly to extol the men he honors, and to give deadly side-thrusts with his irony at half a dozen political foes. Of this the following is an example: —

"As for the enormous wax candles and superstitious mummeries and painted jackets of the Catholic priests, I fear them not. Tell me that the world will return again under the influence of the small-pox; that Lord Castlereagh will hereafter oppose the power of the Court; that Lord Howick and Mr. Grattan will do each of them a mean and dishonorable action; that anybody who has heard Lord Redesdale speak once will knowingly and willingly hear him again; that Lord Eldon has assented to the fact of two and two making four without shedding tears or expressing the smallest doubt or scruple, — tell me any other thing absurd or incredible, but for the love of common-sense let me hear no more of the danger to be apprehended from the general diffusion of Popery."

It is when it takes the form of *irony* that the logic of wit is most telling. The etymology of "irony" reveals its meaning. Εἰρωνεία, the Greek word, is from εἴρων, "dissembler." The power of irony lies in the contrast between the speaker's thought and his expression; or rather, between the thought which he evidently designs to express, and that which his words signify. The apparent drift and the real

current of the speech are brought into antagonism, by which the point of the jest is sharpened when the real intention of the author is discovered. This form of words has been compared to the asp that was brought to Cleopatra, which had the fatal sting, though concealed in flowers. It is more galling than an open attack, because it embarrasses an opponent's reply; the meaning designed to be conveyed being intelligible enough, but not contained in the language used, the jest becomes hard to grapple with. It is "the Judas-betrayal with a kiss." It insinuates the most galling satire in the language of praise; "places its victim on a bed of briers and thistles thinly covered with rose-leaves; lays bare the most sensitive and shrinking nerves of his mind, and then blandly touches him with ice, or smilingly pricks him with needles." A controversialist who uses irony is like a waterman who looks one way and rows another; or, rather, he is a Parthian warrior, who looks toward one quarter and fights toward the opposite, — who flies from his enemy, and at the same time shoots his arrows in his face.

Some striking examples of severe, taunting irony may be found in the Bible. The earliest one occurs in the book of Job, where "the man of Uz" exclaims, when his friends come to comfort him: "No doubt but ye are *the* people, and wisdom shall die with you." In the second book of the Chronicles there is a passage in the narrative of the life of a Jewish prince which looks like a sarcasm on the medical practitioners of Palestine. We read that "Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet," and that his disease (evidently the gout) "was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." The writer immediately adds,

with exquisite gravity, as if this was the cause of his death, that "Asa *slept with his fathers*, and *died* in the one and fortieth year of his reign." In the taunt of Elijah to the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, when he mocked them and said, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked," we have an example of the most cutting and sarcastic irony. Again, in Isaiah's invective against idolatry, and in some of the Apostle Paul's epistles, there is irony, as in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, iv. 8, 10. Our Saviour blighted Pharisaism with irony and terrible invective: "*Full well* ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition!" Persons who regard Christianity as a purely meek, passive, effeminate thing, may be perplexed by the apostle's irony to his brethren; but "he," says F. W. Robertson, "who has never experienced the affectionate bitterness of love, who has never known how *earnest* irony and passionate sarcasm may be the very language of love in its deepest, saddest moods, is utterly incapable of even judging this passion."

Originally the word "irony" in Greek was used to denote the peculiar mode of disputation employed by Socrates, — that is, his assumption of the character of an ignorant learner asking information from a person better informed. To place the adversary's opinion in the foreground, saluting it with every demonstration of respect, while really busied in withdrawing one by one all the supports on which it rests; to entangle him in admissions which, while appearing to strengthen and support his argument, really involved him in an absurd conclusion, making him take the bait, so to speak, wholly unconscious of the hook with which he was

to be captured, — this was the practice in which the dialectical irony of Socrates consisted. Entering the presence of some renowned master of wisdom with the air of a man intellectually bankrupt, Socrates expresses the profoundest veneration for his genius, and listening with seemingly intense admiration to his brilliant declamation, humbly suggests that some little difficulty occurs to him which he doubts not so much wisdom can readily solve. He then begs, with great deference, to ask two or three simple questions, not with any thought of disputing the sage's conclusions, but simply for his own satisfaction. "The Sophist, however, if a stranger, elated by his praises and charmed with the deference of one who, so far from professing to rival him in his own field, seems likely rather to prove a docile listener than a formidable antagonist, encourages him in a patronizing manner to propose his doubts and difficulties, and assures him of a satisfactory and instant solution. Socrates thanks him, and generally begins with some question, apparently so simple, so stupidly simple, and at such a distance from the field of discussion, that his opponent no doubt often hesitates whether most to admire the docility or wonder at the stupidity of the querist, and with a complacent smile, half of pity, half of contempt, promptly replies. Other questions succeed, faster and faster, more and more difficult, and gradually approaching, in one long spiral of interrogations, the central position in which the unhappy Sophist's argument stands. He now finds it impossible to escape, and confounded, perplexed, and irritated, discovers that he is compelled to admit some palpable contradiction to his original assertions, and this too by means of those simple and innocent premises which he had so unsuspectingly granted. He feels himself within

the coils of a great logical boa-constrictor, who binds his folds tighter and tighter, till the poor Sophist is absolutely strangled."

One of the great masters of irony in modern times is Cervantes. In "Don Quixote" he satirized the mania for romances of chivalry which were deluging Europe in his day. It was not chivalry itself that he ridiculed, but the fantastic follies committed under its banners, and, above all, the foolish imitations of it, the mock enthusiasm and cant which read and prated of heroic deeds, but never performed them. In his portraiture of the enthusiastic, monomaniacal knight, he depicted the Spain of that age, the Quixote of the nations, wedded to the past, clinging to the bankrupt institutions, the hollow faiths, the superstitious mummeries, and punctilio of old, opposing all progress, and provoking the derision of the world. The irony of Cervantes has no gall or sting in it; it is the irony of a guileless, tender-hearted man, that manifests itself in neither a sneer nor a laugh, but in a gentle, reproving smile. Philip III. was so delighted with the romance that seeing a student on the bank of a river, near his palace, reading a book, and ever and anon striking his forehead, and bursting into fits of laughter, he said: "That man is either mad or reading 'Don Quixote.'" The latter proved to be the fact.

The greatest master of irony since Plato — at least of delicate and playful irony, void of all coarseness and buffoonery — was unquestionably Blaise Pascal. In his "Provincial Letters," in which he shows himself to be the most brilliant and deadly controversialist that ever engaged in intellectual fence, he has by his exquisite and inimitable pleasantry made scholastic, theological, and casuistical dis-

cussions, which would otherwise have been as dry as "the remainder biscuit after a voyage," as amusing as a romance or a comedy. M. Louis de Montalto, a Parisian, being ignorant, and desirous of information regarding the theological disputes of the day, is represented by Pascal as going for instruction to a worthy Jesuit father, who, in the hope of making a convert, relates without hesitation, or rather with an air of triumph, the ingenious and subtle contrivances by which the Jesuit casuists had explained away, inverted, or evaded every principle of morals and every obligation of Christianity. After each interview he transmits an account of it to a friend in the provinces, whence the name of the collected epistles, "Provincial Letters." In the course of the conversations it appears that according to the moral code of the Jesuits, judges might take bribes, valets perpetrate any villanies in their masters' service, bankrupts defraud their creditors, gentlemen fight duels, poltroons shoot their enemies from behind a hedge, and all these crimes would be lightly treated by a Jesuit confessor, on the strength of a nice distinction between act and intention, by which every crime in the world, even the most atrocious, might be excused. The ironical compliments of the supposed novice, with intermingled doubts and objections; the Socratic shrewdness and Socratic urbanity; the affected simplicity, masking real logical acuteness, with which he involves the father in the most inextricable dilemmas; the expressions of astonishment, which lead the Jesuit to fortify every assertion by an array of authorities; the ridiculous consequences which, with the utmost affectation of simplicity, the inquirer draws from the worthy father's doctrines, driving him, in the exigency, to yet more damaging statements and admissions, — are not surpassed by any other specimens of

irony in ancient or modern times. Nothing can be more perfect than the finish of the wit; more masterly than the ease with which the argument, though abstruse, is conducted, without recourse to logical forms; or more pungent than the ridicule with which the subtle, hair-splitting distinctions of school-divinity are assailed.

Pascal's wit is not the cool, sardonic irony of Swift, far less the venomous sarcasm of Junius. It is French wit, — the lively, delicate, polite, piquant wit, the light, hurrying, scorching satire, of the early French school. It is not a verbal wit, but that of argument; the chain of reasoning is the conductor of its lightning-flashes; and it is characterized throughout by that masterly restraint and repression which, it has been justly said, gives to the wit of two or three of the most brilliant Frenchmen a subtle power which the less habile genius of our language denies to English wit. It is this restraint, as well as its Attic salt and elegance, its delicacy and refinement, that distinguishes Pascal's style from that of the over-praised Junius, which is elaborate, pompous, and antithetical, never self-forgetful, never in repose; while that of the "Provincial Letters" is the transparent, elastic, unobtrusive medium of the thought.

The following is a fine specimen of Pascal's manner:

"'Here is the book of Father Annat,' said the monk. 'Turn up to page 34, where there is a dog's-ear, and read the lines which I have marked with pencil: they ought to be written in letters of gold.' I then read these words: 'He that hath no thought of God, nor any apprehension' — that is, as he explained it, any knowledge — 'of his obligation to exercise the acts of love to God, or contrition, has no actual grace for exercising those acts; but it is equally true that he is guilty of no sin in omitting them, and if he is damned, it will not be as a punishment for that omission.'

A few lines below he adds: 'The same thing may be said of a culpable *commission*.' 'You see,' said the monk, 'how he speaks of sins of *omission* and *commission*. Nothing escapes him. What say you to that?' 'Oh, my dear sir,' cried I, 'what a blessing this will be to some persons of my acquaintance! I must positively introduce them to you. You have never, perhaps, in all your life met with people who had fewer sins to account for! In the first place, they never think of God at all; their vices have got the better of their reason; they have never known either their weakness or the physician who could cure it; they have never thought of "desiring the health of their soul," and still less of "praying God to bestow it;" so that, according to M. le Moine, they are still in the state of baptismal innocence. They have "never had a thought of loving God, or of being contrite for their sins;" so that, according to Father Annat, they have never committed sin through the want of charity and penitence. Their life is spent in a perpetual round of all sorts of pleasures, in the course of which they have not been interrupted by the slightest remorse. These excesses have led me to believe that their perdition was inevitable; but you, father, inform me that these same excesses secure their salvation. Blessings on you, my good father, for this new way of justifying people! Others prescribe painful austerities for healing the soul; but you show that souls which may be thought desperately diseased are in quite good health. What an excellent device for being happy, both in this world and in the next! I had always thought that the less a man thought of God, the more he sinned; but from what I can see now, if one could only succeed in bringing himself not to think upon God at all, everything would be sure with him in all time coming. Away with your half-and-half sinners, who retain some sneaking affection for virtue! They will be damned, every soul of them. But commend me to your arrant sinners, — hardened, unalloyed, out-and-out, thoroughbred sinners. Hell is no place for them; they have cheated the devil by sheer devotion to his service!'"

Unable to reply with any success to their powerful and adroit antagonist, the Jesuits accused him of "turning sacred things into ridicule." To this charge he replied

very much in the spirit of England's reply to Ireland in one of the old wars between those countries. The Irish had laid up their corn in a church, hoping that the sanctity of the building would preserve their stores. The English replied that the sacrilege lay with the enemy in converting the holy place to such a purpose, and removed the grain as coolly as if the sanctuary had been a barn.

The "Letters," as might be supposed, had an immense circulation. They were found lying on the merchant's counter, the lawyer's desk, the doctor's table, and the lady's toilette; all classes sought for them, and read them with avidity and zest. The Jesuit fathers were overwhelmed with consternation. The names of their favorite casuists were turned into by-words and proverbs. *Escobarder* (from Escobard, one of their subtlest casuists) came to signify "paltering in a double sense," — to use chicanery, equivocation. The persecution which the Jesuits declared they suffered in consequence of "Les Menteurs," as they called the "Letters," could be compared, they said, only to the torture inflicted on the first martyrs, who were first rubbed over with honey, and then left to be stung to death by wasps and wild bees.

Gibbon the historian read the "Provincial Letters" when young, and at sixty declared that he had re-perused them almost every year afterward with new pleasure. From Pascal he flattered himself that he had learned to manage the weapons of a grave and temperate irony even on subjects of ecclesiastical solemnity, — a great mistake; for there is as much difference between the light grace of Pascal's irony, and the stiff, formal movement of Gibbon's, who cannot lay aside his stilted, pompous manner, even when describing the most trivial events, as between an Arab

courser and a Flanders war-horse. "The difference between an innocent smile and a sardonic grin is scarcely greater," says Henry Rogers, "than that between the irony of Pascal and the irony of Gibbon: the one speaks with a sweet, *riant* air, as with the consciousness that what is ridiculed is ridiculous; the other, with a cautious, stealthy, Guy-Faux look, as if conscious of a sinister purpose. . . . Gibbon's irony is so elaborate as to lose much of its grace, even when innocent; in other cases it is so marked as to leave the reader in doubt whether the author meant what he seems to mean, or whether he is not meditating, by the very form of expression, a pusillanimous escape from the inferences that may be legitimately founded on it."

One of the earliest English writers who used the logic of irony to a large extent was Defoe; but his irony, though masculine, is neither so subtle nor so delicate as that of several other English wits. In his famous work entitled "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters," written when the feud between the High Churchmen and the Low Churchmen began to rage in the Anglican Church, he assumed the character of a High Churchman, and deliberately advocated the extermination of the Dissenters. The irony in many passages was so broad that it seems almost incredible that any man but a dunce could have failed to perceive it; yet the mask was so well worn that the work was applauded at both Oxford and Cambridge, and the Dissenters were seriously alarmed by it. The Churchmen were delighted to have their secret wishes so ably set forth; they committed to memory and quoted its arguments. One country clergyman was so deceived by its mock logic that he wrote that he valued it next to his Bible. "I pray God," he concluded, "to put into her Majesty's heart to put what is

there proposed into execution." When the real drift of the work was at last discovered, it enraged all parties. The High-fliers were furious at their own humiliation; they might have overlooked an insult, but Defoe had made them ridiculous, — the butt of inextinguishable laughter; and few men can pardon a wound to their self-esteem. The Nonconformists, on the other hand, were exasperated to think that they had been the victims of their own pleasantry, — hoaxed by their own hoax. A reward of fifty pounds was offered for the apprehension of the mocking author; the book was burned by the common hangman, and Defoe was soon afterward fined, pilloried, and imprisoned. Eleven years later he wrote some ironical reasons against the succession of the House of Hanover, which were misinterpreted by the very Government he was supporting, and, greatly to his surprise, he was imprisoned as a downright Jacobite. It is curious to contrast the reception of this work with that of Swift's famous "Rhapsody," — the ironical praises in which, of the king, queen, and royal family, were so skilfully expressed that the author received a message of thanks.

The Dean of St. Patrick's was a consummate master of irony, — the greatest, indeed, that English literature can boast. His irony was infinitely more subtle than that of Defoe, and far more stinging too. A morose, cynical, misanthropical man, depraved in some respects in the very core of his being, he was one of the most original and sarcastic wits that ever lived. In controversy he was never delicate in the treatment of opponents, but struck with a sledge-hammer, and was especially remarkable for his muscular energy and force. Unlike many other satirists, he never seeks simply to excite laughter, but holds up an object to

ridicule because he hates it and would extirpate it from the earth. No sneaking kindness for his victim is to be detected in his crucifying raillery; he is not, as a critic has well said, a mere admirer of the comic picturesque, who will sometimes rack or gibbet an unhappy person for the sake of the fantastic grimaces he may make, or the capers he may cut in the air. "He has the true spirit of an executioner, and only loves his joke as sauce and seasoning to more serious work." Coleridge has characterized Swift, who was an intense admirer of Rabelais, as "the soul of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place;" but while Rabelais' wit was joyous and fantastic, that of Swift was saturnine, severe, and caustic. It is the biting acrimony of his temper that gives edge to his wit; his mocking irony springs from his keen sense of impropriety, his impatience of absurdity, his inward bitterness of thought.

It is hard to say in which of his satirical works the dean's genius for irony is most conspicuously displayed. It was in the "Tale of a Tub" that he first manifested his full powers. For seven years the work lay in manuscript, but the world recognized it at once, when published, as a masterpiece; and its author, many years afterward, when the infirmities of age and disease had fastened upon him, and he was beginning "to die at top," was heard to exclaim with sorrow: "What a genius I had when I wrote that book!" It was not, however, in this book, but in "Gulliver's Travels," that Swift's genius flashed forth most brightly, illuminating, as it did, the eighteenth century with a vivid and penetrating glare. The work was instantly popular, and the public was frantic to know the author. A learned bishop is said, on reading it, to have cried out that there were some things in it which he could

not quite believe! *Qui hait les vices, hait les hommes*, said Danton, the French revolutionist; and it was humanity itself, not its meanness, vanity, vice, and degradation, that Swift satirized. In the travels of Gulliver to Lilliput, his irony is used to ridicule the presumptuous dogmatism of little men on great things. The two political factions of England are satirized under the titles of High-heels and Low-heels, and the religious divisions — Protestants and Papists — as Big-Endians and Small-Endians. In the Voyage to Brobdingnag the author turns the telescope, and painting Gulliver, who had been a giant among the Lilliputians, as a pygmy among giants, satirizes the folly of expending great mental powers upon petty and trifling occupations. In the Voyage to Laputa he ridicules the Royal Society, and holds up projectors to contempt; in the Voyage to the Land of the Houyhnhnms he launches into a fierce, mocking diatribe on human nature. It is perhaps fortunate that of the thousands who year after year hang with delight over this fascinating tale of travel, the great majority are blind to the libel it masks on mankind. To the youthful and unsuspicious the author comes as a friend from fairyland. It is only later years, with the acuter perception, the melancholy experience, and the distrust they bring, that break the enchantment, dispel the illusion, and reveal the ghastly meaning.

In 1729 Swift published a pamphlet in which he gravely proposed to relieve the distresses of the Irish poor by converting their children into food for the rich. The cool, formal, business-like way in which his calculations are made and stated, and the skill with which the style of a projector and the terms of the shambles are preserved throughout, render this one of the most extraordinary — or, more prop-

erly, horrible — pieces of pleasantry in the whole range of literature. So ingeniously was the irony sustained that a foreign writer cited the pamphlet as proof of the extreme distress of Ireland, which rivalled that of Jerusalem during its last siege; while another quoted it as proof of the hopeless barbarity of the English people.

A far more exquisite piece of irony than this, which, with all its skill, seems to us of a ghastly kind, is Swift's "Argument to prove that the Abolishing of Christianity might be attended with some Inconvenience." To appreciate this performance we must remember that it was in an age of infidelity that Swift wrote, — infidelity not learned and sceptical, but flippant and superficial. The first advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity, he says, is that it would very much enlarge liberty of conscience, — that great bulwark of the British nation, — and men could no longer be punished for blasphemy. To this Swift replies that "this rather shows the necessity of a nominal religion among us. Great wits love to be free with the highest subjects; and if they cannot be allowed a God to revile or renounce, they will speak evil of dignities, abuse the Government, and reflect upon the ministry," etc. Another advantage proposed by abolishing Christianity, says the dean, is the clear gain of one day in seven, which is now entirely lost; besides the loss to the public of so many stately structures, now in the hands of the clergy, which might be converted into playhouses, market-houses, exchanges, common dormitories, and other public edifices.

"I hope I may be forgiven if I call this a perfect cavil. I readily own there has been an old custom, time out of mind, for people to assemble in the churches every Sunday, and that shops are still frequently shut, in order, as it is conceived, to preserve

the memory of that ancient practice ; but how this can prove a hindrance to business or pleasure, is hard to imagine. . . . What if the men of pleasure are forced, one day in the week, to game at home, instead of at the chocolate-houses ? Are not the taverns and coffee-houses open ? Can there be a more convenient season for taking a dose of physic ? . . . Is that not the chief day for traders to sum up the accounts of the week, and for lawyers to prepare their briefs ? But I would fain ask how it can be pretended that the churches are misapplied ? Where are more appointments and rendezvouses of gallantry ? where more care to appear in the foremost box, with greater advantage of dress ? where more meetings for business ? where more bargains driven of all sorts ? and where so many conveniences or incitements to sleep ? "

In a similar strain of irony Swift replies to various other arguments for abolishing Christianity, and then proceeds to consider some of the inconveniences that would result from such a measure : —

" If Christianity were once abolished, how could the freethinkers, the strong reasoners, and the men of profound learning be able to find another subject so calculated in all points whereon to display their abilities ? What wonderful productions of wit should we be deprived of from those whose genius, by continual practice, has been wholly turned upon raillery and invectives against religion, and would therefore never be able to shine or distinguish themselves upon any other subject ? We are daily complaining of the great decline of wit among us, and would we take away the greatest, perhaps the only, topic we have left ? Who would ever have suspected Asgel for a wit, or Toland for a philosopher, if the inexhaustible stock of Christianity had not been at hand to provide them with materials ? Had a hundred such pens as these been employed on the side of religion, they would have immediately sunk into silence and oblivion."

Swift's irony, like vivid imagery, is often the short-hand of thought, the quintessence of a score of arguments. True wit of every kind is, indeed, often but " wisdom in

a gaseous form, the distilled essence of unseen truths, — too earthly, it may be, for poetry, but too spiritual for mere prose," — and suggests a hundredfold more than it expresses.

Voltaire employed the logic of irony with more delicacy than Swift, but with no less crushing force. Both were fierce, misanthropical spirits, whose wit, though mirth-provoking, was *par excellence* that of Mephistopheles, — the wit of scorn and contempt. The contrast between the *froide raillerie* of the one and the *sæva indignatio* of the other is vividly seen when one compares "Micromégas" with "Gulliver," — works written for similar ends, but differing in treatment, style, and turn of wit. Far greater still is the contrast between Voltaire and Rabelais. The irony of the monk who "laughed in his easy chair" sprang from an exuberance of animal spirits, a riot in the blood; that of Voltaire, from an excess of *sang-froid,* cynicism, and contempt. Devoid of all enthusiasm, he has no strained emphasis, no overwrought antithesis; in his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry, crumbling leaves. His wit is

> "as keen
> As is the razor's edge invisible,
> Cutting a smaller hair than may be seen;"

and the wound he inflicts is not a gash or a stab, but a puncture so fine as scarcely to be felt till it rankles and festers in its deadly effects. Of the three master-spirits of irony we have considered, it may be said that the monk makes our sides ache with his mingled learning and buffoonery; the French wit, with his sly grin of contempt, makes everything he derides appear hateful and despicable; but the dean inspires us with loathing as well as scorn.

"We laugh with Rabelais; we sneer with Voltaire; with Swift we despise and we abhor."

It is in his comic romances, especially in "Candide," written to ridicule optimism, that Voltaire's genius for irony is best seen. It was because optimism was the creed of the rulers and aristocracy, of brilliant, scented courtiers, and perfumed abbés, who spent their lives in selfish pleasure, while thousands were perishing for lack of bread, — who boasted of the advanced civilization of France, while the people were crushed by taxes, imposts, and invidious laws, — that he satirized that rose-colored view of the world and life. Never before had a moral theory been exploded with such a burst of satire and laughter as that of Leibnitz in this brilliant and inimitably ironical tale. The simplicity of Candide, who believes, as he starts on his travels, that all is for the best in this the best possible of all worlds; the wonderful adventures through which he and Pangloss pass, unshaken in their happy creed; the repulse he meets with because he is not sure that the pope is Antichrist, when in distress he begs aid of a Calvinist who had just been preaching an hour on charity; the portrait of the *blasé* Pococurante, who, living in luxury, is disgusted with art, music, the opera, and everything he possesses, — upon which the hero of the story exclaims, "What a great man that Monsieur Pococurante must be! Nothing pleases him!" the six dethroned kings, whom, to his amazement, Candide falls in with at Venice, — all these topics are treated with the most exquisite wit and humor. The existence of evil is treated as an insoluble enigma; any philosophy of it, as the most absurd anthropomorphism. "When his Highness the Sultan sends a vessel to Egypt," says the old dervish at Constantinople

to Candide, "does he care whether the rats in the hold are or are not comfortable?" Of all Voltaire's tales this is the masterpiece, and its influence on the thinking of that volcanic age was prodigious.

Wordsworth, in speaking of "Candide," calls it "the dull product of a scoffer's pen." "Candide" dull! that masterpiece of satire, steeped in the very essence of wit, albeit with "hell-broth" commingled, over which thousands of sceptics and believers, scoffers and devotees, have year after year, for over a century, hung fascinated! If Wordsworth's sneer is just, then, conversely, Drelincourt on "Death," Blair's "Grave," and Wordsworth's "Excursion" are witty, and Bossuet's "Oraisons Funèbres," prodigies of facetiousness. The truth is, that excess of wit is the prevailing fault of Voltaire's writings; it is the sun pouring down his rays on the entire landscape, without a bit of shade to relieve the dazzled eye. He was as far from being dull as he was from being, as many have supposed, a mere mocker, — a sceptic proclaiming only negations. Had he been such, he would not have been, with all his wit and exquisite literary skill, backed by encyclopædic knowledge, the most puissant writer of his time, or have caught the ear of successive generations. Man cannot live in a vacuum; and no prophet who is wholly false, no mere pyrrhonist, who feeds him with doubts and denials, will be long accepted as his teacher and leader.

Burke, whose wit was far inferior to his other gifts, employed, nevertheless, in his youth, the logic of irony with happy effect in his "Vindication of Natural Society, by a late noble Lord." Assuming the person and imitating the style of the brilliant but shallow Lord Bolingbroke, he employs all the arguments, and with equal force, against civil

institutions which the latter had urged against ecclesiastical. Of a similar character was a defence of the historical evidences of Christianity in an ironical pamphlet by Archbishop Whately, published anonymously in 1820, entitled "Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte." Adopting Hume's arguments against the truth of Scripture history, based on the supposed incredibility of the miracles narrated in it, Whately proceeds gravely to show that no such man as Bonaparte ever lived; that objections similar to those urged by Hume against the Scripture narratives, and far more plausible, might be made against the received accounts of the great Corsican. In the third edition of the essay the author cites the death of Napoleon (in 1821), which had then just occurred, as a confirmation of his theory, — asserting that just when his tract had raised the public scepticism to an alarming height, it was found convenient to announce that its subject was dead! "Supposing the whole of the tale I have been considering to have been a fabrication, what would be the natural result of such an attempt to excite inquiry into the truth? Evidently the shortest and most effectual mode of eluding detection would be to *kill* the phantom, and so get rid of him at once." In the seventh, ninth, and eleventh editions the author kept up the irony by postscripts about the bringing home of Napoleon's remains, and the accession of Louis Napoleon to the French throne. That a real coffin, with real bones, was brought from St. Helena to France, he sees no reason to disbelieve, nor any why the French should not have a Bonaparte of their own; "for there is, I believe, no doubt that there are, or were, several museums in England which, among other curiosities, boasted each of a genuine skull of Oliver Cromwell."

One of the happiest passages in the work is the following reply to some obvious objections: —

"But what shall we say to the testimony of those many respectable persons who went to Plymouth on purpose, and saw Buonaparte with their own eyes? Must they not trust their own senses? I would not disparage either the eyesight or the veracity of those gentlemen. I am ready to allow that they went to Plymouth for the purpose of seeing Buonaparte; nay, more, that they actually rowed out into the harbor in a boat, and came alongside of a man-of-war, on whose deck they saw a man in a cocked hat, who, *they were told*, was Buonaparte. This is the utmost point to which their testimony goes; how they ascertained that this man in the cocked hat had gone through all the marvellous and romantic adventures with which we have been so long amused, we are not told. Did they perceive in his physiognomy his true name and authentic history? Truly this evidence is such as country people give one for a story of apparitions: if you discover any signs of incredulity, they triumphantly show you the very house which the ghost haunted, the identical dark corner where it used to vanish, and perhaps even the tombstone of the person whose death it foretold. Jack Cade's nobility was supported by the same irresistible kind of evidence. Having asserted that the eldest son of Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, was stolen by a beggar-woman, 'became a bricklayer when he came to age,' and was the father of the supposed Jack Cade, one of his companions confirms the story by saying: 'Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the bricks are alive at this day to testify it; therefore, deny it not.' . . .

"Much of the same kind is the testimony of our brave countrymen who are ready to produce the scars they received in fighting against this terrible Buonaparte. That they fought and were wounded, they may safely testify; and probably they no less firmly *believe* what they were *told* respecting the cause in which they fought: it would have been a high breach of discipline to doubt it; and they, I conceive, are men better skilled in handling a musket than in sifting evidence and detecting imposture. But I defy any one of them to come forward and

declare, *on his own knowledge*, what was the cause in which he fought, under whose commands the opposed generals acted, and whether the person who issued those commands did really perform the mighty achievements we are told of."

The logic of irony has often been employed with wonderful effect in the senate. The keen, cutting, polished irony of Canning was dreaded by his parliamentary antagonists far more than his brilliant powers of reasoning and declamation. One of its most dangerous characteristics was, that it was swift and stealthy, — "it stabbed like a stiletto." Not less deadly was the irony of Disraeli, especially when aided by his by-play, — the subtle modulation of his voice, his peculiar shrug, and icy coolness; it was the steel hand in the silken glove. Lord Brougham was a consummate master of the logic of irony, — an irony which seldom sparkled with pleasantry, but was usually saturated with scorn and contempt. In a speech made during a visit of George IV. to Scotland, he spoke of the institutions, etc., which his Majesty would see, and added: "But one thing he will not see. Strange as it may seem, and to many who hear me, incredible, from one end of the country to the other he will see no such thing as a bishop, — not such a thing is to be found from the Tweed to John o'Groat's; not a mitre; no, not so much as a minor canon, or even a rural dean; and in all the land not even a single curate! So entirely rude are they in Scotland, in such outer darkness do they sit, that they support no cathedrals, maintain no pluralists, suffer no non-residence; nay, *the poor, benighted creatures are even ignorant of tithes.* Not a sheaf, or a lamb, or a pig, or the value of a plough-penny, do the hapless mortals render from year's end to year's end! Piteous is their lot! . . . Let us hope that his Majesty may return

safe from the dangers of his excursion into such a country, — an excursion most perilous to a certain portion of the Church, should his royal mind be infected with a taste for cheap establishments, a working clergy, and a pious congregation."

Archdeacon Hare, commenting, in "Guesses at Truth," on the objections urged against wit and irony, justly says that to complain of them, as some do, is to complain of a sword for being sharp. He adds that "so long as error and evil passions lift up their heads in literature, the soldiers of Truth must go forth against them; and seldom will it be practicable to fulfil the task imposed on Shylock, and cut out a noxious opinion, especially where there is an inflammable habit, without shedding a drop of blood." On the other hand, nothing is more delightful than to meet with a man who is a master of the weapons of wit and irony, yet keeps them under perfect control; for the perfection of strength is in the reserve of power, and he is the most exquisite swordsman who can disarm, without wounding, his adversary. A writer in the "Fortnightly Review" cites a case in point, where Voltaire, having easily, like such a swordsman, put aside his opponent's guard, foregoes the death-lunge which would end the duel at once, and contents himself with inflicting a disdainful scratch. Ridiculing Warburton's denial of the vindictiveness of the Jewish character, he exclaims: "Est-il possible qu'un cœur tel que le sien se trompe si grossièrement sur la haine? C'est un usurier qui ne sait pas compter." A less contemptuously confident swordsman, says the reviewer, would hardly have contented himself with this lightning-like pass and recovery, but would have transfixed his adversary again and again.

That the use of irony in discussion is attended with

some disadvantages, even when this weapon is handled by a passed-master of controversial fence, must be granted. As the object of wit is to amuse, the owl-like gravity of many weak-minded persons is apt to infer that the witty or humorous speaker or writer must of necessity be a trifling one. Perceiving the wit, they conclude that nothing but wit is intended, and overlook a solid and unanswerable argument, which they mistake for a joke. As if the dazzling brilliancy of the Toledo blade proved its incapacity to cut! As Archbishop Whately says: "Such men having been warned that 'ridicule is not the test of truth,' and that 'wisdom and wit are not the same thing,' they distrust everything that can possibly be regarded as witty, not having judgment to perceive the combination, when it occurs, of wit with sound reasoning. The ivy-wreath completely conceals from their view the point of the *thyrsus*." Again, it is an old trick of those whose pernicious principles or sophistries have been held up to ridicule, to pretend that the ridicule has been directed against solemn or sacred things, — as if Isaiah, in his taunts against those who "bow down to the stock of a tree," or as if South, in his gibe at the Egyptians who "adored leeks and garlic, and shed tears at the smell of a deified onion," had intended to ridicule, not the misdirection of the worship, but devotional feelings themselves! It was to such a ruse that the Jesuit priests resorted when their juggles and shufflings with the principles of morality and the doctrines of the Gospel were exposed and held up to derision and scorn by the matchless irony of Pascal. Such tricks, despicable as they are, are by no means always unsuccessful. Unfortunately, there are persons in every community who are incapable of comprehending not only the subtlest, but the most palpable, irony;

and what is more natural than that, understanding it literally, they should be indignant at the strange and apparently absurd reasoning, and, when the subject is a religious one, even scandalized? Both Burke's "Vindication of Natural Society" and Whately's "Historic Doubts" were read, on their first publication, by hundreds of persons without a suspicion of the irony pervading every page. Well has the author of the latter work said, that he who can laugh at what is ludicrous, and at the same time preserve a clear discernment of sound and unsound reasoning, is no ordinary man.

CHAPTER V.

EPIGRAMS.

"Omne epigramma sit instar apis : sit aculeius illi :
Sint sua mella, sit et corporis exigui."

WHY is it that good epigrams, at making which the wits of all ages have tried their hands, are so rare? Of the thousands that have been composed it has been estimated that not over five hundred are good, and that of these not more than fifty meet all the conditions of excellence, and may be pronounced gems without a flaw. Martial, the Roman poet, who wrote fourteen books of epigrams, frankly confesses that of that vast number only a few are good, some passable, and the great majority utter failures. The reason is not far to seek. Though less genius is required to produce this species of literary composition than is demanded by a sustained effort, such as an ode, an elegy, or a lyric, yet in certain respects it is as difficult and as exacting as an epic. In its very brevity lies its difficulty. Nobody expects an Iliad or a Paradise Lost to be one perpetual blaze of splendor; prosaic and even dull passages are not only excusable, but needed as foils, for nothing tires so soon as perpetual brilliancy and gorgeousness unrelieved. The more exquisite the enjoyment we derive from any source, the more imperiously is an occasional suspension required. But while good Homer may be allowed to nod occasionally, as Horace has told us,

it is not so with the epigrammatist. He must condense his wit into a few brief lines; it must be intensely pungent, — like some extract which is the essence of a thousand roses, and is fraught with their accumulated odors, or the weight of a hundred pounds of bark in a few grains of quinine.

The precise characteristics of an epigram one may not easily define. It differs from a joke in the fact that the wit of the latter lies in the words, and cannot always, therefore, be conveyed in another language; while an epigram is a wit of ideas, and hence is translatable. Like aphorisms, songs, and sonnets, it is occupied with some single point, small and manageable; but while a song conveys a sentiment, a sonnet a poetical, and an aphorism a moral, reflection, an epigram expresses a contrast. Its chief requisites are elegance, polish, and terseness of expression, consummate ease of versification, distinctness of idea, and, above all, an adroit satiric ending, or sting in the tail. Dulness and artistic defect are here inexcusable, and no broad mantle of "poetic license" can cover the sin. Especially is it essential that an epigram be brief It has been justly said that of two epigrams, *ceteris paribus*, the longer is the less. Four lines are better than six, and two than four. The Spartan brevity, no less than the Attic salt, is indispensable, though there seems no need for so rigid a limit as Boileau's, — *un bon mot de deux rimes ornés.* Originally an epigram was merely an inscription on an altar, temple, or monument; and, far from being bitter or sarcastic, it was commemorative or laudatory. An examination of the epigrams inscribed on tripods in Apollo's temple at Thebes, as recorded by Herodotus, of the famous distichs on the tomb of the heroes who fell at Thermopylæ, and of the epigrams cited by Thucydides as

extant in his day in the temple of the Pythian Apollo, will show that the primary object of the epigram was simply to commemorate persons or events on stone, marble, or brass. Such records would of necessity be very brief, and the main effort of the writer would be to condense in the fewest words the most telling praise and the most meritorious feature of the object commemorated. Next the epigram came by analogy to express thoughts which *might* have served as inscriptions, and which had been preserved by oral tradition; and then, again, to mean a short poem containing some single thought pointedly expressed, the subjects being various, — amatory, convivial, eulogistic, didactic, artistic, or humorous. Even then, however, the sting was no necessary part of it; and all that the Greeks aimed at was perfect literary finish and simplicity. Their epigrams rarely exceeded six or eight verses in length, and had a clear-cut, sculpturesque character. It was the Roman satirists who changed both the form and the substance of the epigram; and it is to them that we are indebted for the idea that it should have a spice of malice. They could not easily divest themselves, in this kind of verse, of their old *sylvestris animus*, and forget the freedom of the early Fescennine license. Their notion of this kind of verse is contained in the distich already quoted: —

> "Omne epigramma sit instar apis: sit aculeius illi:
> Sint sua mella, sit et corporis exigui," —

which has been loosely translated thus: —

> "The qualities three that in a bee we meet,
> In an epigram never should fail, —
> The body should always be little and sweet,
> And a sting should be left in its tail."

The Roman poet Martial was the founder of the modern epigram, — "the rapier-pointed epigram," as it is styled by Keats, — the English recipes for making which generally insist that it should have both the grace and the deadliness of the rapier-like thrust. But what a gulf between such an epigram and the original Greek one, which, it has been truly said, was "lively without guile, and pointed without intent to vex or offend!" It was Lessing who first explained the connection between the two. Disagreeing with Vavassor, who contended that the original meaning of the word was of no importance, since that meaning was lost, and had been replaced by another, the German critic insisted that use in language is rarely, if ever, entirely arbitrary, and that when a word originally applied, for plain reasons, to one thing comes to be restricted, for reasons less evident, to another, there is, or must have been at some time or other, some connection between the things themselves. What is the connection in the present case? Rejecting the conclusion of Scaliger (who discovered it, as he thought, in the brevity which characterizes both the true epigram and the inscription), and the definition of Batteux (who asserted that an epigram is an ingenious thought happily and tersely expressed), Lessing declared that it is the *form*, not the matter, which constitutes an epigram, and defined it as a short poem, which, like an inscription, at once raises our curiosity and gratifies it. A groundless reproach turned into a compliment; a foolish jest refuted by a witty repartee; a difficulty propounded and cunningly evaded; a mystery raised of which the dexterously contrived solution is kept for a time out of sight, — form the true epigram of modern times. Commenting on Lessing's definition, an English writer observes that "a true epigram, then, should

consist of two parts, — first, the raised expectation; and, secondly, the satisfying fulfilment. For example: —

> "'Ci-gît Piron, qui ne fut rien,
> Pas même Académicien.'

The first line here raises our expectation. Why should Piron tell us that he was nobody? And if he was, what then? But the second line makes the witty writer's meaning clear, and we are pleased and satisfied, as by an inscription.

> "'Ci-gît ma femme. Ah, qu'elle est bien
> Pour son repos, — et pour le mien!'

Here the raising of our expectation ends at *repos*, and a very mild one it seems."

A collection of epigrams, to be of much value and interest, should have some system, illustrating the styles of wit, as well as tones of thought, which have prevailed in different ages, — a merit which the collection by the Rev. J. Booth, published a few years ago in London, has not. The book, on the contrary, is a mere catacomb of miscellaneous pieces, good, bad, and indifferent, without any chronological arrangement or selection; and the classification, if classification it can be called, is as illogical as it is defective. Still, the author, casting his net into the great sea of literature, has fished up many fine epigrams; and of these I shall cull out some of the best, adding to them a larger number which I have gathered, in my reading, from ancient and modern sources. To begin with the ancients: The simplicity of the Greek epigram, and, above all, the want of sting in the old ones, has led some persons to regard them as tame, and even insipid. But the ideal of the Greeks in this kind of composition was the

union of perfect simplicity with perfect beauty, and it was not till a later day that the epigram was made the vehicle of satire and ridicule, or used to produce hilarity and mirth. Is not that ideal attained in the following lines on the Spartans who fell at Thermopylæ? —

> "Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by,
> That here, obedient to their laws, we lie."

The next epigram is by Antipater of Sidon on Aristomenes, a Messenian prince who was a brave and determined enemy of Sparta. It is addressed to an eagle which saved his life when the Spartans had precipitated him down a pit: —

> "'Majestic bird! so proud and fierce,
> Why tower'st thou o'er that warrior's hearse?'
> 'I tell each godlike earthly king,
> Far as o'er birds of every wing
> Supreme the lordly eagle sails,
> Great Aristomenes prevails.
> Let timid doves, with plaintive cry,
> Coo o'er the graves where cowards lie;
> 'T is o'er the dauntless hero's breast
> The kingly eagle loves to rest.'"

The spirited translation of this admirable epitaph, which is by Leyden, is worthy of the original.

Ben Jonson's song, "Drink to me only with thine eyes," is supposed to have been inspired by the following:

> "The wine-cup is glad! Dear Zenophilè's lip
> It boasts to have touched when she stooped down to sip.
> Happy wine-cup! I wish that, with lips joined to mine,
> All my soul at a draught she would drink up like wine."

Here is an epigram upon Ladas, a famous runner, of whose swiftness the most extravagant statements were made: —

"If Ladas ran or flew, in that last race,
Who knows? — 't was such a *demon* of a pace."

To this another couplet was added: —

"Scarce was the starting-rope withdrawn, when there
Ladas stood crowned, yet had not turned a hair."

A parody on this ridiculed a runner who was so slow that he seemed never to move: —

"If Pericles there ran or sat, none knew, —
He was so demoniacally slow.
Scarce was the rope withdrawn, when there
Ladas stood crowned, and Pericles was — where?"

Among the epigrams in the Greek Anthology there is one on "Lais's Looking-glass," ascribed to Plato, and which Prior has "conveyed" and condensed thus:

"Venus, take my looking-glass,
Since I am not what I was.
What from this day I shall be,
Venus, never let me see."

Some of the happiest Greek epigrams are by Callimachus. One of his gems has been finely set in English by H. N. Coleridge: —

"They told me, Heraclitus, thou wert dead;
And then I thought, and tears thereon were shed,
How oft we talk'd down the sun. But thou,
Halicarnassian guest, art ashes now!
Yet live thy nightingales of song. On those
Forgetfulness her hand shall ne'er impose."

If in Roman hands the epigram excelled in pungency, it is certain that in simple beauty or elegance it has never since reached the perfection to which it attained in its native soil, the Greek. What can be more perfect of its kind than this, which is a free translation by Lord Nugent? —

"I loved thee beautiful and kind,
And plighted an eternal vow;
So altered are thy face and mind,
'T were perjury to love thee now."

Or this, by an unknown author, "On a statue of Niobe":

"To stone the gods have changed her — but in vain;
The sculptor's art gave her to breathe again."

We have room for but one more example from the Greek, an epigram by Meleager, which has been often imitated:

"A hue-and-cry for Love! The wild one's fled!
Just now at dawn he left his rosy bed.
Glib is his tongue; the lad sheds pretty tears;
Fleet is his foot; his heart unknown to fears.
Around his smile a dash of scorn he flings;
His quiver-bearing-back is girt with wings.
I cannot name his sire; for earth and sky
And sea the bold brat's parentage deny.
Nowhere is he a favorite. Yet, beware!
Perchance e'en here for hearts he lays his snare.
Yes, there 's his ambush! Mark him, where he lies!
Archer, I spy thee in yon maiden's eyes!"

Of all the writers of epigrams, in ancient or modern times, the Roman poet Martial was probably the most prolific. The subjects of his sixteen hundred or more pieces are chiefly the minor immoralities of his day, — petty affectations and hypocrisies; absurdities and extravagances in dress or demeanor; and charlatans, quacks, and bores in literature or in society. But many of his compositions differ little from the short poems of Tibullus and Propertius, and are rather elegies than epigrams. While one may cull from his thick volume many of the latter which have the true ring, he is distinguished, on the whole, by graceful fancy, vivid description, and brilliant execution, rather than by the wit which we now look for in the epigram. His

chief faults are his grossness, his flattery of the cruel and debauched Emperor Domitian, and his coarse personalities. The indecency of a subject rarely restrains him if he can say a brilliant thing upon it; nor does consideration for the feelings of his victim check his pen when he can give a sting to his verse by personal allusion or invective.

In one of his epigrams he addresses the owner of "a house for show;" and after speaking of its fine approaches, its lofty porticos standing on a hundred columns and paved with polished marble, its capacious baths, together with the hippodromes, murmuring fountains, etc., — in short, everything but warmth and hospitality, — he concludes: —

> "Atria longa patent: sed nec cœnantibus usquam
> Nec somno locus est. *Quam bene non habitas!*"

or, in English, —

> "Apartments grand; no place to eat or sleep.
> What a most noble house you do *not* keep!"

Cervantes compares translations to the reverse side of tapestry; but the following rather gains in point than loses by the transfusion from Latin into English: —

> "Difficilis, facilis, jucundus, acerbus es idem,
> Nec tecum possum vivere, nec sine te."

This Addison translates thus: —

> "TO A CAPRICIOUS FRIEND.
>
> "In all thy humors, whether grave or mellow,
> Thou 'rt such a touchy, testy, pleasant fellow,
> Hast so much wit and mirth and spleen about thee,
> There is no living with thee, nor without thee."

Nothing can be more thoughtful or more apposite to our own times, when men are so swamped by business cares,

than the lines to Postumus which Cowley has so beautifully translated: —

> "To-morrow you will live, you always cry.
> In what far country does this morrow lie,
> That 't is so mighty long ere it arrive?
> Beyond the Indies does this morrow live?
> 'T is so far-fetched, this morrow, that I fear
> 'T will be both very old and very dear.
> To-morrow I will live, the fool doth say;
> To-day itself 's too late, — the wise lived yesterday."

One of the most pungent of Martial's epigrams is the following: —

> "Petit Gemellus nuptias Maronillæ,
> Et cupit, et instat, et precatur, et donat.
> Adeone pulchra est? Immo fœdius nil est.
> Quid ergo in illa petitur et placet? Tussit."

The effect of this epigram lies in the sudden *tussit*, "she coughs," which stops the hurried questions, bringing them down with a pistol-shot. The following version, by G. H. Lewes, preserves much of the terseness and *élan* of the original: —

> "Gemellus wants to marry Maronilla;
> Sighs, ogles, prays, and will not be put off.
> Is she so lovely? Hideous as Scylla!
> What makes him ogle, sigh, and pray? Her cough!"

Martial's lines "To an Ill-favored Lady" are very subtle and sarcastic: —

> "While in the dark on thy soft hand I hung,
> And heard the tempting siren in thy tongue,
> What flames, what darts, what anguish I endured!
> But when the candle entered, I was cured!"

Less delicate, but equally pointed, is the sarcasm against the doctor turned undertaker, who, as the same wit says, does *not* change his profession by the change: —

"Nuper erat medicus, nunc est vespillo Diabus;
Quod vespillo facit, fecerat et medicus," —

which Boileau, no doubt, had in his eye when he wrote that delicious couplet: —

"Il vivait jadis à Florence un médecin,
Savant hableur, dit-on, *et célèbre assassin.*"

If brevity is the soul of wit, the following epigram may be regarded as perfect: —

"Pauper videri vult Cinna — et est pauper."

"Cinna pretends to be poor, and is what he pretends," — a monostich rarely excelled.

How much truth is condensed in the following line, —

"Quisquis plus justo non sapit, ille sapit;"

and what student of human nature will not acknowledge the justness of the poet's cynical saying, that gold and wealth and estates many a friend will bestow: one who consents to yield the palm in genius is rare? —

"Aurum, et opes, et rura frequens donabit amicus,
Qui velit ingenio cedere, rarus erit."

The fertility of Martial's fancy is strikingly illustrated by the thirty-third epigram of the eighth book, and the eighteenth of the eleventh. One Paulus had presented the poet with a drinking-cup made of a leaf from a prætor's crown, and of the very thinnest gold metal. This tiny goblet Martial contemptuously likens to the lightest things of which he can conceive. He asks the donor if it be not a piece of gilding scraped off by the nail of a cunning servant from the leg of the donor's couch. Why, it is shaken by a gnat flying at a distance, or the wing of the tiniest

butterfly! The flame of the smallest lamp makes it flit about, and the least wine poured into it would break it. It is thinner than the spider's web, and lighter than the thread of the silk-worm. The chalk lies thicker on the face of old Fabulla, and the bubble is thicker on an agitated wave. The cuticle of an unhatched chick is not more delicate, the lily which wilts in the sun is not more unsubstantial, than this bit of metal which you pompously call a wine-cup. Why did you not send me a spoon, or a snail-shell? In a similar vein of pleasantry the poet jests about the suburban farm which Lupus has given him. Call you this an estate, he asks, which the wing of the chirping grasshopper suffices to cover, which an ant could lay waste in a day, which the leaf of a rose-bud would canopy, in which a cucumber cannot lie straight, nor a snake uncoil itself? A mouse would destroy the whole territory, and is as much dreaded by the farmer as the Calydonian boar. A swallow carries off my whole crop and deposits it in his nest. My harvest, when gathered, scarcely fills a snail-shell, and all my wine a nut-shell. The poet ends by telling Lupus that he has made a mistake, though only in one letter: "Instead of giving me a *prædium* [farm, or estate], I would rather you had given me a *prandium* [dinner]."

Among those who, since the days of Martial, have tried their hands at epigram-making have been some of the most eminent divines, jurists, physicians, poets, and scholars, — such as Cardinal Bembo, Strozzi of Ferrara, Boileau, Sir Thomas More, George Buchanan, John Owen, J. C. Scaliger, Ben Jonson, Cowley, Dryden, Pope, Addison, Prior, Congreve, Johnson, Goldsmith, and Landor. One of Scaliger's best epigrams is on the relative drunkenness of two notorious wine-bibbers, which will remind the reader of the

Irishman's plea, when accused of getting drunk again after grave warning, that his master was mistaken, for it was "the same drunk:"—

> "Inebriatur bis Loserus in die;
> Semel Bibinus. His quis ebriosior?
> Imo Bibinus non *fit* ebrius semel, —
> Non *fit*, sed est: et semper est illud *semel*."

One of the most prolific of British epigrammatists was John Owen, a Welshman, an Oxonian, and a poor country schoolmaster. He published a volume of Latin epigrams in 1620. One of the happiest of them is the following, the sarcasm in which gained him a place in the Papal *Index Expurgatorius*, and lost him one in the will of a rich Catholic uncle:—

> "An *Petrus* fuerit Romæ, sub judice lis est:
> *Simonem* Romæ nemo fuisse negat."

> "If Peter ever was at Rome,
> By many has been mooted;
> That Simon there was quite at home,
> Has never been disputed."

The next is ingenious:—

> "Hoc quod adest Hodie, quod nomen habebat heri? Cras.
> Cras Hodie quodnam nomen habebit? Heri.
> Cras lentum, quod adest nunquam, nec abest procul unquam,
> Quonam appelletur nomine cras? Hodie."

Another early English epigrammatist who wrote many of these pungent verses was Sir John Harrington, who in 1591 translated Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso." His epigram on treason is often quoted:—

> "Treason doth never prosper. What's the reason?
> Why, if it prospers, none dare call it treason."

Of many epigrams the chief element is surprise, — an artifice by which an unexpected turn is suddenly given to some apparently careless assertion. A good example is this hit at a fat doctor: —

> "When Edwards treads the streets the paviors cry,
> 'God bless you, sir!' and lay their rammers by."

The best machinery for surprise is the amœbæic poem, or question and answer, as in the dialogue of the traveller and the clergyman: —

> "*C.* — I 've lost my portmanteau.
> *T.* — I pity your grief!
> *C.* — All my sermons are in it.
> *T.* — I pity the thief!"

Pope, who is one of the most epigrammatic of poets, wrote few epigrams which are disconnected from his other verses; but his poems, from the "Essay on Criticism" to the "Dunciad," are strewn with antithetical couplets that are "steeped in the very brine of conceit, and sparkle like salt in fire." What can be keener or more sparkling than those in the lines on "Atticus," or than this sarcasm? —

> "Nature well known, no prodigies remain;
> Comets are regular, and Wharton plain;"

or, again, the portraiture of an intriguing woman who, after aiming at loftier game, saw a surer and easier prey, and

> "Stooped at once,
> And made a hearty meal upon a dunce."

The satires of Young abound in terse and caustic epigrams, of which the following rivals the happiest conceits of Pope: —

"'T is health chiefly keeps an atheist in the dark, —
A fever argues better than a Clarke;
But let the logic of the pulse decay,
The Grecian he 'll renounce, and learn to pray."

Of one of Young's deadliest thrusts, Voltaire, the coryphens of French epigrammatists, was the victim. The French wit having in Young's presence decried Milton's genius, and ridiculed particularly the personification in "Paradise Lost" of Death, Sin, and Satan, the Englishman, indignant at the Frenchman's irreverence and levity, lifted his finger, and pointing at him, said: —

"Thou art so witty, wicked, and so thin,
Thou art at once the Devil, Death, and Sin."[1]

The erection of a monument some years after his death to the author of "Hudibras," who died in the most squalid quarter of London, and was indebted to the charity of a friend for a grave, provoked one of the acutest epigrams in the language. The author is the celebrated Charles Wesley: —

"While Butler, needy wretch, was yet alive,
No generous patron would a dinner give;
See him, when starved to death, and turned to dust,
Presented with a monumental bust!
The poet's fate is here in emblem shown:
He asked for bread, and he received a stone."

The times of William III., Queen Anne, and George I. were the great age of historical epigrams in England. One of the personages most frequently satirized during this period was the Duke of Marlborough, whose petty avarice and

[1] There is another version of these lines, which runs as follows: —

"You are so witty, profligate, and thin,
At once we think thee Milton, Death, and Sin."

haggling with the Bath chairmen, and uxorious fondness for his termagant, Sarah, were remembered long after the conqueror of Blenheim was forgotten, — just as Lord Peterborough walking from market in his blue ribbon, with a fowl under one arm and a cabbage under the other, threw into the shade the hero of Almanza. Marlborough's new palace of Blenheim was the target of ceaseless shafts, — as, for example, this epigram on the high arch built over the little brook in the park: —

> "The lofty arch his high ambition shows;
> The stream an emblem of his bounty flows."

A more murderously severe lampoon on the hero of Blenheim and Malplaquet was that by Swift, which closes thus: —

> "Behold, his funeral appears!
> Nor widows' sighs, nor orphans' tears,
> Wont at such times the heart to pierce,
> Attend the progress of his hearse.
> But what of that? — his friends may say —
> He had those honors in his day:
> True to his profit and his pride,
> He made them weep before he died."

It is pleasant to contrast this fierce satire of Swift with the delicate pleasantry of Addison. "Swift uses the knout like a Russian; Addison tickles a man into agonies with a feather. Swift is *dicax*, and Addison *facetus*."

Though the epigram did not flower fully in England till the eighteenth century, yet it reached a high degree of excellence in the time of Charles II. What can be more sarcastic than the following by Cleveland? —

> "Had Cain been Scot, God would have changed his doom, —
> Not forced him wander, but confined him home."

"Si sic omnia dixisset!" exclaims Dryden, in his essay on "Dramatic Poesy." "This is wit in all languages; it is, like mercury, never to be lost or killed." Unfortunately, this is the best of the very few good hits in the satire of "The Rebel Scot," from which it is taken. The truth is, Cleveland was a coarse, vindictive, unscrupulous satirist, who had an abundance of scoffing venom, but hardly a drop of genuine humor in his nature. He manifested some wit in his scurrilous poems, as when he ridiculed the eccentricities of the Puritans, their "gospel semplars" wrought in needlework, their steeple-hats, ghastly faces, and "heavenly hawings and hummings;" or when he defined a "protector," to ridicule the man who afterward upon his petition released him from prison. But except a few gleams of pleasantry, his satirical verse — abounding, as it does, in far-fetched conceits and metaphysical conundrums — is very hard reading.

It has been said of Prior that if he could not stab with the rapier, he could prick with the needle. In the following lines he describes a remedy that is worse than the disease:

"I sent for Ratcliffe; was so ill
That other doctors gave me over:
He felt my pulse, prescribed his pill,
And I was likely to recover.

"But when the wit began to wheeze,
And wine had warm'd the politician,
Cured yesterday of my disease,
I died last night of my physician."

Who wrote the following stinging epigram on Lord Chesterfield's "Letters to his Son"? It is the quintessence of sarcastic bitterness: —

"Vile Stanhope! demons blush to tell,
In twice two hundred places,
Has shown his son the road to hell,
Escorted by the Graces.

"But little did the ungenerous lad
Concern himself about them;
For base, degenerate, meanly bad,
He sneaked to hell without them."

Dr. Doddridge wrote the following beautiful lines, which Johnson pronounced the most perfect epigram in the English language: —

"DUM VIVIMUS VIVAMUS.

"'Live while you live!' the epicure would say,
'And seize the pleasures of each passing day.'
'Live while you live!' the sacred preacher cries,
'And give to God each moment as it flies.'
Lord, in my view let both united be:
I live in pleasure when I live to Thee!"

The following is a translation by Sir William Jones from the Persian: —

"On parent's knees, a naked, new-born child,
Weeping thou sat'st, while all around thee smiled;
So live that, sinking in thy last long sleep,
Calm thou may'st smile while all around thee weep."

Of Oxford epigrams we have some choice specimens, of which we can give only a few of the briefest in this chapter. An alteration in the statutory exercises for divinity degrees, by which two theological *essays* were required in future from the candidates, drew forth the following:

"The title D. D. 't is proposed to convey
To an A double S for a double S A."

The honorary degree of D. C. L. having been declined by a distinguished officer on account of the heavy fees at that time demanded, his refusal was thus set forth: —

"Oxford, no doubt you wish me well,
But prithee let me be;
I can't, alas! be D. C. L.,
Because of L. S. D."[1]

Lord Erskine, the eloquent advocate, was happy in epigram. The following was perpetrated after he had complained of feeling unwell at Lady Payne's house: —

"'T is true I am ill; but I need not complain,
For he never knew pleasure that never knew *Payne*."

The next, by the same author, is familiar to all lovers of wit: —

"The French have taste in all they do,
Which we are quite without;
For Nature, that to them gave *goût*,
To us gave only gout."

A large majority of the epigrams of all ages have turned on the follies of certain set and customary characters,

[1] A portion of this chapter appeared in my book entitled "The Great Conversers, and other Essays," published in 1873. In a letter which lies before me, written (Aug. 2, 1874) to an English friend by a celebrated British statesman and scholar, a graduate of Eton and Oxford, there are some remarks on the essay, from which I take the following: "I see that he [Mr. Mathews] has read Lessing, who, if I recollect right, is admirable on the Greek epigram; but he does not give quite place and weight enough to that fine old form, which did not depend upon a particular point in one part, but was point all over, and had great simplicity for a main characteristic. We have one nearly perfect nineteenth-century example, in a distich on one of the Eton Fellows, — a well-meaning, loud, not very solid preacher, whom I have sat under: —

'Didactic, dry, declamatory, dull,
The Bursar Bethell bellows like a bull.'

He was Bursar of the College."

regarding them from conventional points of view. Women who paint and women who scold, sermons that have the effect of poppy and mandragora, the rascality of lawyers, and Death's imprudence in carrying off doctors, are old and hackneyed themes, on which the changes have been rung for ages. Of legal jests, one of the best, though rather long, is the following hit at that stiff Conservative, Lord Eldon (with others), whose brain was so fruitful of doubts and scruples, — who, according to Abraham Hayward, loved an *if* as much as Tristram Shandy hated one, and in his extreme age could hardly utter a sentence without some qualification or saving clause: —

"Mr. Leach made a speech,
Angry, neat, but wrong;
Mr. Hart, on the other part,
Was prosy, dull, and long.

"Mr. Bell spoke very well,
Though nobody knew what about;
Mr. Tower talked for an hour,
Sat down fatigued and hot.

"Mr. Parker made the case darker, —
Which was dark enough without;
Mr. Cooke quoted his book,
And the Chancellor said, '*I doubt.*'"

The author of this was Sir George Rose, to whom Lord Eldon, not long after, in deciding a case against him, said: "In *this* case, Mr. Rose, the Chancellor does *not* doubt."

One of the "modern improvements" in epigrams is the artifice of parody, which some persons may regard as a poor trick, but which, as it doubles the surprise, and therefore the efficiency, others will deem commendable. A good

illustration is the following hit at him whom Hood denotes as "once *Little*, but now *Moore*:" —

"When Limerick once, in idle whim,
Moore as her member gayly courted,
The boys, for fun's sake, asked of him
To state what party he supported.
When thus to them the answer ran:
'I 'm of no party, as a man,
But, as a poet, *am-a-tory*.'"

The poet thus wittily characterized was one of the most sparkling of epigrammatists. Though erotic verse may have been his *forte*, yet he showed that the bow of Cupid can wound as well as the bow of Apollo. One of the great charms of his wit was its ease and spontaneity. His political squibs were remarkable alike for their piquancy and point, and for the air of unconscious facility with which they were delivered. As a critic has said, he was in controversy as quick and as vexatious as a mosquito; and he had an eminent advantage in his musical command of verse, for his hum charms the ear while his sting tortures the flesh. He was like his own

"bees of Trebizond,
Which from the sunniest flowers that glad
With their pure smile the gardens round,
Draw venom forth that drives men mad."

Of the scores of *jeux d'esprit* that fell from his pen, we have room only for the following, on a vain politician, which suggests a kind of speculation that might be made very profitable in these days: —

"The best speculation the market holds forth
To any enlightened lover of pelf,
Is to buy —— up at the price he is worth,
And sell him at that he puts on himself."

Of epigrams on names the name is legion. Dr. Lettsom's "Principles of Medicine" stands in the front rank for its pith and unpretending stoicism, which is content to do its duty and abide the consequences: —

"If anybody comes to I,
I physics, bleeds, and sweats 'em;
If after that they like to die,
Why, what care I? I. LETTSOM."

In the next we have the very *apices rerum*: —

"With Pius, Wiseman tries
To lay us under ban:
O Pius, man unwise!
O im-pious Wiseman!"

When Disraeli, in a speech on the death of Wellington, borrowed without acknowledgment a passage from a French eulogy on Marshal St.-Cyr, by Thiers, he became the victim of endless puns, gibes, and epigrams, among which was this ironical defence: —

"In sounding great Wellington's praise,
Dizzy's grief and the truth both appear;
For a great flood of tears [Thiers] he lets fall,
Which were certainly meant for sincere [St.-Cyr]."

A happy epigram was made by an old gentleman of the name of Gould, who, having married a very young wife, wrote a poetical epistle to a friend to inform him of it, and concluded thus: —

"So you see, my dear sir, though I 'm eighty years old,
A girl of eighteen is in love with old Gould."

To which his friend replied: —

"A girl of eighteen may love Gould, it is true;
But believe me, dear sir, it is gold without U."

The celebrated scholar, Dr. Parr, attended for a short time upon Queen Caroline to read prayers, etc. His place was afterward supplied by a gentleman of the name of Fellowes; upon which the following epigram was written:

"There 's a difference between
Dr. Parr and the queen;
For the reason you need not go far;
The doctor is jealous
Of certain little Fellowes,
Whom the queen thinks much above Parr."

How far such word-twisting as the following is excusable, we leave the reader to judge: —

"That Homer should a bankrupt be,
Is not so very Odd, D'ye See,
If it be true, as I 'm instructed,
So Ill-he-had his books conducted."

One of the neatest and most caustic epigrams of this century was the one which Byron so much admired, on Ward, — a tonguey Parliamentary orator and writer for the magazines, who had criticised Rogers's "Italy" with great severity. Referring to Ward's practice of passing off cut-and-dry speeches for extempore ones, the banker-poet, who was "constantly dropping epigrams which fell and blistered like drops of burning sealing-wax," gave him the following rapier-like thrust: —

"Ward has no heart, they say; but I deny it:
He has a heart, and gets his speeches by it."

It is said that Rogers was helped a little in writing this epigram by Richard Sharp.

The following playful colloquy is said to have taken place at a dinner-table between Sir George Rose and James Smith, in allusion to Craven Street, Strand, London, where the latter resided: —

"*J. S.*—At the top of my street the attorneys abound,
And down at the bottom the barges are found:
Fly, Honesty, fly to some safer retreat,
For there 's craft in the river, and craft in the street."

"*Sir G. R.*—Why should Honesty fly to some safer retreat,
From attorneys and barges, 'od rot 'em?
For the lawyers are *just* at the top of the street,
And the barges are *just* at the bottom."

Who is the author of this epigram?—

"TO A MR. WELLWOOD, WHO EXAGGERATED.

"You double each story you tell;
You double each sight that you see:
Your name 's W, E, double L,
W, double O, D."

The following lines are said to have been written by Byron in a copy of Shenstone's Works:—

"'I cannot understand,' says Dick,
'What 't is that makes my legs so thick;'
'You do not understand,' says Harry,
'How great a calf they have to carry.'"

On the death of George IV., W. M. Praed wrote an "Epitaph on the late King of the Sandwich Islands," of which the following is one of the verses:—

"A noble, nasty course he ran,
Superbly filthy and fastidious;
He was the world's 'first gentleman,'
And made the appellation hideous."

It is said that the great comic genius of France, Molière, was seized with a mortal illness while playing the *rôle* of a dead man in one of his own comedies. He was immediately carried home, where he died in a few hours. In reference to this singular event the following lines were written:

"Within this melancholy tomb confined,
Here lies the matchless ape of human kind,
Who, while he labored with ambitious strife
To mimic death, as he had mimicked life,
So well, or rather ill, performed his part
That Death, delighted with his wondrous art,
Snatched up the copy, to the grief of France,
And made it an original at once."

The following epigram on the eminent singer, Miss Tree, is by Peacock: —

"On this Tree, if a nightingale settles and sings,
The Tree will return her as good as she brings."

Landor has written epigrams which have been rightly characterized as of pure Hellenic beauty. The following from his pen, the closing lines of which tremble with the very music of feeling, was greatly admired by Charles Lamb, who said that it had a charm which he could not explain, — "he had lived upon it for weeks:" —

"Ah, what avails the sceptred race,
Ah, what the form divine!
What every virtue, every grace!
Rose Aylmer, all were thine.
Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep, but never see,
A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee."

The following is *simplex munditiis*. Who is the author? —

"Madame Dill
Is very ill,
And nothing will improve her,
Until she sees
The Tuileries,
And waddles through the Louvre."

Few epigrams are more ingenious than the following parody on the noted grammatical line, *Bifrons atque Custos*,

Bos, Fur, Sus, atque Sacerdos. The author, curiously enough, was a Canterbury clergyman: —

> "*Bifrons* ever when he preaches;
> *Custos* of what in his reach is;
> *Bos* among his neighbors' wives;
> *Fur* in gathering of his tithes;
> *Sus* at every parish feast;
> On Sundays, *Sacerdos*, a priest."

Lessing has given us one of the best specimens of the German epigram: —

> "Es hat der Schuster Franz zum Dichter sich entzückt,
> Was er als Schuster that, das thut er noch: er flickt;" —

which, roughly rendered, runs thus: —

> Tompkins forsakes his last and awl
> For literary squabbles;
> Styles himself poet; but his trade
> Remains the same, — he cobbles.

It was the strife between Goethe and Schiller on the one hand, and the Philistines of their day on the other, that gave to the world many of the most brilliant German epigrams. When those two literary brothers were treated by their enemies as pretenders of doubtful gifts, they retaliated in the "Horen," and especially in the "Xenien," — so-called from a series of personal epigrams in the thirteenth book of Martial. It was a war of the giants, — not with the gods, but with that thick-skinned stupidity against which Schiller said that even the gods fought in vain. The sensation produced by these "epigrammatic little Dunciads" was tremendous. According to Mr. Lewes, the biographer of Goethe, all the writers in Germany — and they were an army — felt themselves aggrieved. All the pietists and sentimentalists were ridiculed; all the pedants and peda-

gogues were lashed. So many persons and so many opinions were scarified that there was a general outcry against the authors. "Since the age of Luther," says Carlyle, "there has scarcely been so much stir and strife in the intellect of Europe."

American epigrams of a high character are not very numerous; yet we have seen a few almost as keen, pithy, and artistically finished as any that have come to us from the other side of the Atlantic. The following, which appeared when Dr. Parsons won the prize for the best prologue to be recited at the opening of the Boston Theatre, is decidedly toothsome: —

"INVITA DENTE.

"'What! Parsons, a dentist? You don't mean to say
That *that* sort of chap bore the chaplet away?'
'Nay, none of your sneers at his laureate wreath;
He 's a very good poet, in spite of his teeth!'"

The following lines to a lady who had published a volume of mediocre poems appeared many years ago in the "Knickerbocker Magazine:" —

"Unfortunate lady, how sad is your lot!
Your ringlets are red — your poems are not."

It has been doubted whether the epigram exactly suits the genius of the English language. There are proofs enough to the contrary, we think, to remove all scepticism on this point; but it must be admitted that the Greek, the Latin, and the French preserve the neatness and the point of this kind of witticism better than our own tongue. One of the most pungent French epigrams is Boileau's verse on the fierce dispute that raged in the Catholic Church concerning the *Homoousion* and the *Homoiousion*. Men tore each other to pieces because they could not agree whether the Son was similar to the substance of the Father,

or of the same substance, — a dispute which hinged on the acceptance or rejection of the dipthong *oi:* —

> " D'une *syllabe* impie un saint mot augmenté
> Remplit tous les esprits d'aigreurs si meurtrières —
> Tu fis, dans une guerre et si triste et si longue,
> Périr tant de Chrétiens, *martyrs d'une dipthongue!* "

The same French poet is author of the following epigrammatic epitaph: —

> " Ci-gît, justement regretté,
> Un savant homme sans science,
> Un gentilhomme sans naissance,
> Un très bon homme sans bonté."

It is said that Napoleon III., at the time of his *coup d'état,* was for some time in anxious doubt as to its issue, and so had twenty-five millions of francs secreted in a carriage, with which he was ready to cross the frontiers of France in case his scheme should fail. This fact justifies the sarcastic epigram of an eminent French poet: —

> " Des deux Napoléons les gloires sont égales,
> Fort bien chacun le sait; ce ne sont faits nouveaux:
> D'Europe le premier prenait les capitales;
> Le troisième aux Français prenait leurs capitaux!"

We have space for only one more Gallic epigram, — the sententious description by some Frenchman of a young lady's daily life: —

> " Elle s'habille, elle babille, elle se deshabille."

Why is it that epigram-writing has gone out of fashion? Is it because we live in a prosaic and realistic age, — because the era of wits and *preux-chevaliers* has gone, and that of " economists and calculators " has succeeded? For a single stroke of wit, one deadly stab which shall give an enemy his quietus, no better form can be conceived; and

we do not wonder, therefore, that it was once an acknowledged and formidable force in literature. Time was when the wits were the lords or lions of society, and a satirical poem of a few lines might ruin a politician, extinguish an author, or cripple, if not overthrow, a ministry. Epigrams were then the favorite weapons of political and personal controversy, and battles were fought with this rapier as decisive as are now won with the clumsy club of the pamphleteer or the broadsides of the newspaper. Many of the ponderous pamphlets and fiery political speeches of those times have been forgotten, while the apparently ephemeral pieces, intended for a transient end, are still read and admired and laughed over. Not a tithe of those who have roared over "The Needy Knife-Grinder" have read Burke's "Letter on the French Revolution;" while such works as Darwin's "Loves of the Plants" and Payne Knight's "Progress of Civil Society" survive only in their parodies.

Why then, we repeat, have we now comparatively few epigrams? Doubtless a partial explanation of their dearth is to be found in the fact that authors are less jealous of each other than in the days of Pope and Dryden; they are no longer divided into hostile cliques, but rejoice in each other's success, and feel that they are members of a common guild. Political contests are less personal than of yore, and indignant lampoons have disappeared with duelling and revengeful party feelings. The epigram was perfected in an age when manners were starched and formal, — an age of minuets, and hoops, and pomatum, and powdered cues, and purple velvet doublets, and flesh-colored stockings; when, too, the classics were studied and imitated more than now, and the antithetical poetry of Pope, Swift, and Dryden, imitated by all, made epigrammatic writing easy and fashionable. The result is that by a pro-

cess of natural selection or adaptation our venom-bags have been absorbed, and men are born without them. Occasionally hybrid specimens of the epigram appear in "Punch," or flower in the backward season and classical air of the English universities; and now and then you are startled by an epigram at once pithy, pointed, and exquisitely finished, in some American journal: but generally they have lost their flavor, and degenerated into vehicles for jokes and puns.

On the whole the change is not to be regretted; for, however agreeable it may be to read epigrams and impromptus, no one could ever have liked to be their victim, — to be a target for gibes and sarcasms. To become a martyr "for the truth's sake" has been the ambition and "last infirmity" of many noble minds; but no one likes to be a butt of ridicule in order to testify the sincerity of his convictions. It has often been remarked that men would rather be deemed villains than fools; and it is certainly more pleasing to our vanity to be hated than to be despised. Human nature was the same in Queen Anne's time as today; and to no man, however thick-skinned, could it ever have been pleasant to have his little personal peculiarities, his "peccadilloes or scapes of infirmity," some *faux pas*, or unlucky blunder, or petty social sin, or "virtuous vice," done into verse, and handed round the breakfast or tea-tables of his particular circle, to amuse his friends and give their cheeks a holiday. Nowadays, if a man's conduct is satirized by a review or newspaper, he reflects, with Bentley, that no man was ever written down except by himself; or reasons, with Abraham Lincoln, that "if the end brings him out right, what is said against him won't amount to anything, — if the end brings him out wrong, ten angels swearing he is right would make no difference;" and so he laughs at the jest if it is a good one, and if otherwise,

lets it hum and buzz itself asleep. Not so with the terse and biting epigram of two to eight lines, which was first confidentially whispered from friend to friend, and then handed about in manuscript long before it was caught up by the press. This insect libel seemed never to die; it stuck to its victim like a gnat, teased him his life long, and oftentimes clung to his memory long after he had been fretted and worried into his grave. It must not be supposed that the exquisite polish and the razor-like sharpness of the jest made it more endurable. Men do not stand still to be stabbed or shot, in mute admiration of the splendid weapons with which they may be assailed. Few persons have the equanimity which Chesterfield manifested when he read Johnson's stinging letter, and can coolly point out and commend the happy conceits, the ingenious turns of expression, in a satirical production, every sentence of which is a stab at themselves. It is true an epigrammatist has said that —

> "As in smooth oil the razor best is whet,
> So wit is by politeness sharpest set;
> Their want of edge from their offence is seen, —
> Both pain us least when exquisitely keen."

But we believe the very reverse is true, — that both cut more deeply, and leave scars that are longer in healing. Johnson was right when he declared that "the vehicle of wit and delicacy" only makes the satire more stinging. Compared with ordinary abuse, the difference, he said, is between being bruised with a club and being wounded with a poisoned arrow.

CHAPTER VI.

PARODY.

It was because Homer was the most popular poet that he was most susceptible of the playful honors of the parodist. — BENJAMIN DISRAELI.

AMONG the oldest and most popular forms of wit, none has been the subject of more praise and blame than parody. Just when it was invented it is not easy to say. A writer in the "Westminster Review" thinks that the first parodist was the comic minstrel in the early days of Greece, who, after the rhapsodist in his scarlet robe had recited to the people passages from the Iliad or the Odyssey, followed with a humorous or a burlesque imitation. Taking up the rhapsodist's strain with an air of mock solemnity, "he mimics his manner and gestures, and repeats a few lines of his high-sounding verse in a tone which sets the audience off in a shout of laughter. He feels that they are with him now, and presently, instead of great Menelaus and Peleus' godlike son, they hear their own names and their own affairs introduced and chanted with epic pomp. It is no longer the fate of Ilium that is to be decided in the council of the gods, but a quarrel between two slaves which they have just witnessed in the market. Unbounded is the mirth that greets every sly hit, which each believes is aimed at his neighbor. The broader the satire, the louder the laugh; and as the minstrel warms in his subject, his jokes become very broad indeed. At

length he ceases, — either his wit or his breath runs short; and he calls for a goblet of heavenly nectar with all the majesty of Jove. Such was the first parodist; and in later times, when the Homeric poems were recited in the theatres, he carried his buffooneries thither. When the rhapsodist retired from the stage he followed, as the farce after the tragedy, and displayed his wit in giving a comic version of the performance."

It is to Hipponax, a Greek comic poet who flourished about the sixtieth Olympiad, and who was remarkable alike for his dwarfish stature and for his feats as an athlete, that the invention of this species of wit has been generally attributed. He is said to have overwhelmed two brothers, sculptors of Chios, with such a torrent of sarcasm for making a too-faithful likeness of his short person and ugly face that they hanged themselves. The dramatic parody, as distinguished from the epic, was introduced by Hegemon of Thasos, who recited it with such masterly skill that the Athenians were convulsed with laughter. His parody of the "Gigantomachia," or "Battle of the Giants," was so steeped in fun that his hearers would not allow him to break off the recitation, though the tidings of the disasters in Sicily were brought to the theatre in the midst of the performance. In the dramatic parody the actors who previously in the solemn tragedy had appeared in magnificent dresses, returned on the stage in grotesque habiliments, with droll postures and gestures, while the story, though the same, was incongruous and ludicrous. We must not suppose that these parodies were necessarily intended as such; the author may have designed only to make his conceits more amusing by comparing the little with the great, the insignificant with the grand.

Though parody in our day has reached a perfection of which the ancient fell immeasurably short, there are many persons who nevertheless look upon it with suspicion or dislike. They acknowledge that it is entertaining, but assert that it is too often irreverent, fatal to our happy illusions, and destructive of our finer feelings. To place the grave and the gay, the heroic and the grotesque, side by side, they say is a sure enough means of raising a laugh, but requires little wit to do it, and it often establishes an association of ideas which it is difficult to get rid of. Just in the degree that we relish a parody do we find less pleasure in the original; a new association has woven itself with its metre, its movement, its rhythm, and something of its charm is lost. We cannot too deeply reverence the beautiful and time-hallowed creations of impassioned fancy. "Fancy is a butterfly which must be delicately handled; if rude fingers tamper with it, the flower-dust is rubbed off, and the gay insect perishes." Granting that to some extent these objections are just, and that parody is obnoxious even to others which we shall presently name, we still believe that it is a legitimate form of wit, and, when not abused, a harmless source of gratification. It is not only capable of increasing "the gayety of nations" by innocuous means, but, when properly handled, of playing the part of a chastener and instructor.

There are some literary evils against which it is the most formidable and effective weapon that can be employed. There are certain affectations and exaggerations of sentiment, certain wearisome mannerisms and pedantries of style, certain catchwords and tricks of metre, which can be effectually chastised in no other way. So when any forms of literature, however beautiful, have been overdone

till they have become a positive bore, it is parody that gives the public deliverance. Some day, when a patient and long-suffering community has been tormented to exasperation, a parodist appears, and by a felicitous burlesque rids the world of the nuisance. The offence is not one which calls for grave censure, for that would only be wasted on the offender. But the laughter of a whole community is what few can despise. French literature has afforded many examples of this. The absurdities of French tragedy have often been exposed by parody, which has thus instructed the public, when its critical discernment has been blinded by prejudice. Fuzelier, defending parody against the denunciations of La Motte, who was exasperated by a burlesque of one of his plays, says that this species of wit, instead of degrading truth by ridicule, strikes only at what is chimerical and false; "it is not a piece of buffoonery so much as a critical exposition. What do we parody but the absurdities of dramatic writers, who frequently make their heroes act against nature, common-sense, and truth? After all, it is the public, not we, who are the authors of these parodies; for they are usually but the echoes of the pit, and we parodists have only to give a dramatic form to the opinions and observations we hear. Many tragedies disguise vices as virtues, and parody unmasks them."

To render a parody successful, three conditions must be fulfilled, — it must be legitimately comic; it must be a skilful mimicry of a well-known original that is neither too good to be above, nor too bad to be below, ridicule; and it must be brief. The last condition is specially important. To be telling and effective, burlesque should hit hard and *at a blow*. Diffuseness weakens, if it is not positively fatal. "Travestie is not a food on which the mind cares long to

feed. It is one of the condiments or delicacies of the intellectual table, not one of the substantial joints." How closely the parodist should imitate his original, is a matter of question. On the one hand, it has been contended that the nearer the original is kept to, and the fewer the alterations needed to produce a totally opposite meaning, the more complete the parody. In proof of this a parody of Pope has been cited. By the alteration of two words only, his lines, —

> "Here shall the spring its earliest *sweets* bestow,
> Here the first *roses* of the year shall blow," —

were wittily applied by a lady to the Regent's Park, London, when it was first opened to the public: —

> "Here shall the spring its earliest *coughs* bestow,
> Here the first *noses* of the year shall blow."

It is the business of the parodist, we are told, to bring a great idea and a trivial one into sudden and unexpected collision, clothed as near as may be in the same dress. His aim is merely amusing verbal contrast, and if he gives us more than this, he defeats his very end. By allowing a free creative humor to steal in, he runs the risk of reducing the force that may be gained by emphasizing merely external peculiarities, which is primarily his business as a parodist. On the other hand, it is contended by an ingenious writer that, in burlesquing individual poetic efforts, a mere subtle suggestion of the piece travestied is what is wanted. "Words and phrases, turns of style, may be utilized, but they must be utilized with skill, so as just to call up the recollection of the original, and no more. They must be like Sydney Smith's famous 'onion atoms;' they must, 'scarce suspected, animate the whole.'" Again,

the same writer contends that, to be thoroughly acceptable, a parody should have an intrinsic humor of its own, — it should have a comical idea at root, and that idea should be worked out simultaneously with the burlesque of the original poem. This seems to us a just and important remark.

The first notable English parody was "The Splendid Shilling," by John Philips, a student of Christ Church, Oxford. It was written in imitation of Milton; and was so admired that when Europe rang with Marlborough's great victory at Blenheim, the author was chosen by Bolingbroke and Harley to celebrate that event. Philips was a shy, retiring man, who was usually silent in company, and occupied only with the pleasures of the pipe. At school he rarely mingled in play with the other boys, but kept in his chamber, where, according to Dr. Johnson, his sovereign pleasure was to sit, hour after hour, while his hair was combed by any one whom he could secure for that service. He was exceedingly fond of smoking, and in every one of his poems, except Blenheim, has sung the praises of tobacco. Notwithstanding the fame which Philips won by his parody, there were many persons, doubtless, among Milton's admirers who were shocked by what they deemed its irreverence, not to say blasphemy; and the felicity of its execution, instead of excusing, seemed to them only to aggravate the offence. To those who, dazzled by Philips's success, might be tempted to imitate his literary feat, Dr. Johnson, in his "Lives of the Poets," has uttered this warning: "To degrade the sounding phrase and stately construction of Milton by an application to the lowest and most trivial things, gratifies the mind with a momentary triumph over that grandeur which hitherto held its captives in

admiration; the words and things are presented with a new appearance, and novelty is always grateful where it gives no pain. But the merit of such performances begins and ends with the first author. He that should again adapt Milton's phrase to the gross incidents of common life, and even adapt it with more art, which would not be difficult, must yet expect but a small part of the praise which Philips has obtained; he can only hope to be considered as the repeater of a jest." Had the writers who were gifted with a genius for parody bowed to this decision of Johnson, nine tenths of the parodies which have amused the world would never have been written.

The following are the opening lines of Philips's parody:

> "Happy the man who, void of cares and strife,
> In silken or in leathern purse retains
> A splendid shilling. He nor hears with pain
> New oysters cried, nor sighs for cheerful ale,
> But with his friends, when nightly mists arise,
> To Juniper's Magpie or Town Hall repairs;
> Where, mindful of the nymph whose wanton eye
> Transfixed his soul and kindled amorous flames,
> Chloe or Phyllis, he each circling glass
> Wisheth her health and joy and equal love.
> Meanwhile he smokes, and laughs at merry tale,
> Or pun ambiguous, or conundrum quaint."

Of his pipe he sings: —

> "Not blacker tube, nor of a shorter size
> Smokes Cambrio-Briton (vers'd in pedigree,
> Sprung from Cadwallader and Arthur, kings
> Full famous in romantic tale), when he
> O'er many a craggy hill and barren cliff,
> Upon a cargo of famed Cestrian cheese,
> High overshadowing, rides, with a design
> To vend his wares, or at th' Arvonian mart,
> Or Maridunum, or the ancient town

Yclep'd Brechinia, or where Vaga's stream
Encircles Ariconium, fruitful soil!
Whence flow nectareous wines that well may vie
With Massick, Setin, or renowned Falern."

Goldsmith once tried his hand at parody, imitating Swift's rhyming manner very happily in an argument tending to show the superiority of brutes to men. Gray and his friend Mason were parodied with less success by Lloyd and Colman. The most brilliant examples of legitimate English parody, in many respects, are the inimitable "Rejected Addresses" of the brothers Horace and James Smith, in which there is keen personal satire without the slightest blemish of ill-nature or vulgarity. Catching with the nicest tact the ridiculous points in the authors imitated, the writers provoked a good-humored laugh, in which even the victims joined. No one was quicker to recognize the cleverness and laugh at the humor of the "Tale of Drury Lane," in which Scott's poetic manner was so happily hit off, than Scott himself. Crabbe, though he complained a little of the prefatory address, confessed that in the versification of "The Theatre" he had been "done" admirably. On being introduced to James Smith, at Richmond, he seized both his hands and exclaimed, with a loud laugh, "Ah! my old enemy, how do you do?" "Tell the author," wrote Byron to Murray, his publisher, "I forgive him, were he twenty times our [*sic*] satirist." What can be more felicitous than the following imitation of Byron, both in the style and in the tone of thought and sentiment? —

"For what is Hamlet but a hare in March?
And what is Brutus but a croaking owl?
And what is Rolla? Cupid steeped in starch,
Orlando's helmet in Augustine's cowl.
Shakspeare, how true thine adage, 'fair is foul!'

To him whose soul is with fruition fraught,
The song of Braham is an Irish howl,
Thinking is but an idle waste of thought,
And naught is everything, and everything is naught."

Or, again, this mimicry of Moore? —

"For dear is the Emerald Isle of the Ocean,
Whose daughters are fair as the foam of the wave;
Whose sons, unaccustomed to rebel commotion,
Though joyous, are sober, though peaceful, are brave.
The Shamrock their Olive, sworn foe to a quarrel,
Protects them from thunder and lightning of rows;
Their Sprig of Shillelagh is nothing but Laurel,
Which flourishes rapidly over their brows."

"I certainly must have written this myself," said the good-natured "Wizard of the North," pointing to the following description of the fire, "although I forget upon what occasion." The climax is perfect: —

"'Back, Robins, back! Crump, stand aloof!
Whitford, keep near the walls!
Huggins, regard your own behoof,
For lo! the blazing, rocking roof
Down, down in thunder falls!'

"Did none attempt, before he fell,
To succor one they loved so well?
Yes, Higginbottom did aspire
(His fireman's soul was all on fire)
His brother chief to save;
But ah! his reckless, generous ire
Served but to share his grave!
'Mid blazing beams and scalding streams,
Through fire and smoke he dauntless broke
Where Muggins broke before;
But sulphury stench and boiling drench,
Destroying sight, o'erwhelmed him quite, —
He sunk to rise no more.
Still o'er his head, while fate he braved,
His whizzing water-pipe he waved:

'Whitford and Mitford, ply your pumps!
You, Clutterbuck, come, stir your stumps!
Why are you in such doleful dumps?
A fireman, and afraid of bumps!
What are they 'fear'd on,? fools! 'od rot 'em!'
Were the last words of Higginbottom."

Every reader of "The Rambler" will recognize in the next extract a reproduction of the rolling, elephantine periods of Dr. Johnson: —

"Professions lavishly effused and parsimoniously verified are alike inconsistent with the precepts of innate rectitude and the practice of external policy; let it not, then, be conjectured that because we are unassuming, we are therefore imbecile; that forbearance is any indication of despondency, or humility of demerit. He that is most assured of success will make the fewest appeals to favor, and where nothing is claimed that is undue, nothing that is due will be withheld. A swelling opening is too often succeeded by an insignificant conclusion. Parturient mountains have ere now produced muscipular abortions; and the auditor who compares incipient grandeur with final vulgarity, is reminded of the pious hawkers of Constantinople, who solemnly perambulate her streets, exclaiming, 'In the name of the prophet, — figs!'"

The minute, painstaking Dutch painting of Crabbe is hit off by James Smith in the following extract with consummate skill. It seems as if the author of "The Village" had written the lines in grave earnest himself. The parody is "like the echo of an eccentric laugh:"—

"John Richard William Alexander Dwyer
Was footman to Justinian Stubbs, Esquire;
But when John Dwyer 'listed in the Blues,
Emanuel Jennings polished Stubbs's shoes.
Emanuel Jennings brought his youngest boy
Up as a corn-cutter, — a safe employ.
In Holywell Street, St. Pancras, he was bred, —
In number twenty-seven, it is said, —
Facing the pump, and near the Granby's Head.

He would have bound him to some shop in town,
But with a premium he could not come down.
Pat was the urchin's name, — a red-haired youth,
Fonder of purl and skittle-grounds than truth."

Though the "Rejected Addresses" had been literally rejected by publishers over and over again, they became immediately popular on publication, and an acquaintance with the authors was eagerly sought for by all the notabilities of the day. After several editions had been issued, a thousand pounds sterling was paid for the copyright; and finally, after the work had run through sixteen editions, Mr. Murray, who had originally refused to give £20 for it, bought the copyright for £131.

Among the happy parodies that preceded those of the brothers Smith was Canning's "Knife-Grinder" (in imitation of Southey), which annihilated English sapphics; the parody, by the same author, of Payne Knight's "Progress of Civil Society;" and that of Darwin's "Loves of the Plants" by the "Loves of the Triangles," — all of which appeared in the "Anti-Jacobin." At the close of the last century the people of England were startled and alarmed by the excesses of the French Revolution, for which the Jacobin Club at Paris was largely responsible. Under the direction of William Gifford a periodical was established, entitled "The Anti-Jacobin," the object of which was to expose and counteract French principles. In this publication Canning, who had distinguished himself at Eton and Oxford, gave full swing to his satirical genius, ridiculing all who opposed the Heaven-descended statesman then at the head of the ministry, or who welcomed the French Revolution, though they deplored its excesses. Knight's poem, published in 1796, was saturated with the new philosophy of the day, and gave the palm of superiority to the unso-

phisticated life of man in the savage state over the customs and manners of civilization. In the parody of the "Loves of the Plants," Dr. Darwin's mania for personification and his tedious and mirth-provoking trick of investing the whole vegetable kingdom with the qualities of thinking and intelligent beings, as well as some of his political and social doctrines, are amusingly ridiculed. "The Phœnician Cone" is represented as an object of affection to three rival curves, Parabola, Hyperbola, and Ellipsis, who contend for her favors like the three goddesses that contended for the apple. Thus three directors woo the young Republic's virgin charms; thus three sister witches hail Macbeth; thus three Fates weave the woof; thus three Graces attire Venus; thus three daughters form the happiness or misery of Leah; and lastly, —

> "So down thy hill, romantic Ashbourn, glides
> The Derby dilly, carrying *Three Insides*," —

lines which, with a change of "three" to "six," were quoted by O'Connell in ridicule of the small number of Lord Stanley's adherents after a general election. In one part of the parody "the imps of murder" are represented as engaged in building ships for the invasion of England, while to another band is assigned another important duty:

> "Ye sylphs of DEATH, on demon pinions flit,
> Where the tall guillotine is raised for Pitt!
> To the poised plank tie fast the monster's back;
> Close the nice slider, ope the expectant sack;
> Then twitch, with fairy hands, the frolic pin, —
> Down falls the impatient axe with deafening din;
> The liberated head rolls off below,
> And simpering Freedom hails the happy blow!"

The great critic, Jeffrey, pronounced "The Loves of the Triangles" the perfection of parody. "All the peculiari-

ties of the original poet," said he, "are here brought together, and crowded into a little space, where they can be compared and estimated with ease." It is a curious fact that while many other poems have survived burlesque, and lived in spite of ridicule, Darwin's is remembered in consequence of it. But for the Attic salt of its satirists, it would have been utterly forgotten. It has been happily said of the "Anti-Jacobin" that it was characterized by something more important than the mere *persiflage* that teases individuals; "like the blade of Damascus, which has a verse of the Koran engraved on it, its fine wit glitters terribly in the cause of sacred tradition." Yet will it be believed that Canning, this very satirist of liberal principles, ultimately died a martyr to his attempts to force liberal measures on the aristocracy of England? Though Southey, Knight, and Darwin had made themselves legitimate butts of his ridicule, yet nothing can be more unjust than his assaults on Coleridge, Lloyd, and Lamb, as well as others who afterwards opposed all his own reforms.

It has been said of that gayest and most sparkling of squib-writers, Thomas Moore, that the effervescence of his light ridicule is as superior to meaner mixtures as sparkling Moselle to ginger-beer. "He is not a great satirist, but the bow of Cupid can wound as well as the bow of Apollo." In spite of the cleverness of his squibs, he would have confessed, we think, that he was rivalled in wit by Canning, when, addressing an eminent commoner, he parodied Moore's own beautiful song, "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms:" —

> "Believe me, if all those ridiculous airs,
> Which you practise so pretty to-day,
> Should vanish by age, and your well-twisted hairs,
> Like my own, be both scanty and gray, —

"Thou would'st still be a goose, as goose thou hast been,
Though a fop and a fribble no more;
And the world that has laughed at the fool of eighteen
Would laugh at the fool of threescore.

"'T is not while you wear that coat of light brown,
Tight breeches and neckcloth so full,
That the absolute void of a mind can be shown,
Which time will but render more dull.

"Oh! the fool that is truly so, never forgets,
But as truly fools on to the close, —
As Ponsonby leaves the debate when he sits,
Just as dark as it was when he rose."

Moore's "'T was ever thus" has been burlesqued by half a dozen writers. The following ingenious version is by Cholmondeley Pennell: —

"Wus! ever wus! By freak of Puck's
My most exciting hopes are dashed;
I never wore my spotless ducks
But madly — wildly — they were splashed!

"I never roved by Cynthia's beam,
To gaze upon the starry sky,
But some old stiff-backed beetle came,
And charged into my pensive eye.

"And oh! I never did the swell
In Regent Street, among the beaus,
But smuts the most prodigious fell,
And always settled on my nose!"

We remember an American burlesque of Moore's verses, a part of which ran as follows: —

"I never had a piece of bread
Particularly good and wide,
That fell not on the sanded floor,
And always on the buttered side."

The sentimentalism which characterizes many of Moore's songs has provoked much ridicule. In the following we

have his own verse and the parodist's amusingly interwoven: —

"When in death I shall calm recline,
When in jail I shall calm recline,
Oh! bear my heart to my mistress dear;
Bear my best coat to some pawnbroker near;
Tell her it lived upon smiles and wine
Show him how stylish the gilt buttons shine,
Of the brightest hue while it lingered here.
And ask him a price that's not too dear.

"Bid her not shed one tear of sorrow,
Bid him not search for bank-notes in the pocket;
To sully a heart so brilliant and light;
For they were lugged out to pay an old debt,
But balmy drops of the red grape borrow,
And all he'll find will be an old locket
To bathe the relic from morn till night.
Of Sal's, she gave me when last we met."

Some of the peculiarities of Wordsworth's style are finely hit off in these lines by Miss C. M. Fanshawe: —

"There is a river clear and fair,
'T is neither broad nor narrow;
It winds a little here and there, —
It winds about like any hare;
And then it takes as straight a course
As on the turnpike-road a horse,
Or through the air an arrow.

"The trees that grow upon the shore
Have grown a hundred years or more, —
So long, there is no knowing.
Old Daniel Dodson does not know
When first those trees began to grow;
But still they grew, and grew, and grew,
As if they 'd nothing else to do,
But ever must be growing."

Of the parodies of Tennyson's poems there is no end. Some of the best are by Bon Gaultier, C. S. Calverley, Shirley Brooks, and —— Sawyer. "Home they brought her Warrior dead" is thus travestied by the last writer:

"Home they brought her sailor son,
Grown a man across the sea, —
Tall and broad and black of beard,
And hoarse of voice as man may be.

"Hand to shake and mouth to kiss,
Both he offered ere he spoke;
But she said, 'What man is this
Comes to play a sorry joke?'

"Then they praised him, — called him smart,
'Tightest lad that ever stept;'
But her son she did not know,
And she neither smiled nor wept.

"Rose, a nurse of ninety years,
Set a pigeon-pie in sight:
She saw him eat, — ''T is he! 't is he!'
She knew him — by his appetite!"

Tom Hood (son of him who sang the "Song of the Shirt") has shown much dexterity in parody-writing, and hit off the peculiarities of Swinburne with great felicity in a burlesque of one of his best-known poems. To appreciate the parody, one should be familiar with the original, of which we give a few verses: —

A MATCH.

If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf,
Our lives would grow together
In sad or singing weather,

Blown fields or flowerful closes,
  Green pleasure or gray grief:
If love were what the rose is,
  And I were like the leaf.

If I were what the words are,
  And love were like the tune,
With double sound and single
Delight our lips would mingle,
And kisses glad as birds are
  That get sweet rain at noon:
If I were what the words are,
  And love were like the tune.

. . . . . .

If you were queen of pleasure,
  And I were king of pain,
We 'd hunt down love together,
Pluck out his flying feather,
And teach his feet a measure,
  And find his mouth a rein:
If you were queen of pleasure,
  And I were king of pain.

Now for Hood's imitation of this novel and difficult metre: —

A CATCH.

BY A MIMIC OF MODERN MELODY.

If you were queen of bloaters,
  And I were king of soles,
The sea we 'd wag our fins in,
Nor heed the crooked pins in
The water dropt by boaters
  To catch our heedless joles:
If you were queen of bloaters,
  And I were king of soles.

If you were Lady Mile-End,
  And I were Duke of Bow,
We 'd marry and we 'd quarrel;
And then, to point the moral,

Should Lord Penzance his file lend,
  Our chains to overthrow:
If you were Lady Mile-End,
  And I were Duke of Bow.

If you were chill November,
  And I were sunny June,
I 'd not with love pursue you;
For I should be, to woo you
(You 're foggy, pray remember),
  A most egregious spoon:
If you were chill November,
  And I were sunny June.

If you were cook to Venus,
  And I were J 19,
When missus was out dining,
Our suppertites combining,
We 'd oft contrive, between us,
  To keep the platter clean:
If you were cook to Venus,
  And I were J 19.

If you were but a jingle,
  And I were but a rhyme,
We 'd keep this up forever,
Nor think it very clever,
A grain of sense to mingle
  At times with simple chime:
If you were but a jingle,
  And I were but a rhyme.

In the following lines on a student who had been "plucked" at a Cambridge examination, we have an imitation of Bret Harte: —

"In the crown of his cap
  Were the Furies and Fates,
And a delicate map
  Of the Dorian States;
And they found on his palms, which were dirty,
  What is frequent on palms, that is, dates."

Perhaps no one has ever contrived to squeeze more bitterness into a parody than did O'Connell in his application of Dryden's well-known lines on Homer, Virgil, and Milton, as epic poets, —

> "Three poets in three distant ages born," —

to Colonels Verner, Percival, and Sibthorpe, — a masterpiece of parodic insult. The beards of Verner and Percival were conspicuous by their absence; not so Sibthorpe's. Two of these gentlemen, it is said, looked as if they never needed a razor; the third, as if he repudiated one.

> "Three colonels in three distant counties born,
> Lincoln, Armagh, and Sligo did adorn.
> The first in matchless impudence surpassed,
> The next in bigotry; in both the last:
> The force of Nature could no farther go, —
> To beard the third, she shaved the other two."

There are some poems and prose writings which, from their intense mannerism, overwrought sentiment, or exceeding triteness, seem positively to invite parody, which, when well done, becomes instantly popular. Such was the case with Alexander Smith's "Life Drama," upon which and Sydney Dobell's "Balder," Professor Aytoun, in "Firmilian," perpetrated his masterly, mirth-provoking quiz. In "Firmilian" parody attains to the positive rank of genius. Never were poets more felicitously ridiculed in verse than the two victims of the professor's satire, who were gibbeted as chiefs of what he called the "Spasmodic School of Poetry," in a work which, after tickling the public with its wit, has taken its place as a classic of parodic literature. It mattered not that a similar term had been applied by Carlyle, years before, to Byron's poetry of unrest and despair; the nickname, hitting off the salient characteristics

and defects of the school to which it was applied, had a nickname's best prosperity, — it stuck; and, as poor Smith afterward complained, no writer of this class could thenceforth air himself in public in a volume of verse, however staid and humdrum, without the cry of "Spasmodist" being raised here, there, and everywhere, so loudly that he was glad to retreat again into his shell. Though such parodies as Aytoun's have made their victims wince, yet the majority of imitations, however laughable, have probably been relished as keenly by the authors of the originals as by the public. To parody a work is, though sometimes unwittingly, to pay it a compliment; for nobody would think of parodying one which was not well known, or which had not acquired some reputation. The success of an imitation must always depend, in part, on the readiness with which its resemblance to the original is perceived; if the original is unknown, the imitation must fall flat. Generally, therefore, it is only the most famous poets or the most familiar poems, — those that are marked by a strong individuality and originality, both in thought and style, — that are pounced upon by the parodist for mimicry; for it is only when burlesquing such that he can be sure that his efforts will be appreciated. Upon what pieces have more changes been rung, even *ad nauseam,* than upon Shakspeare's "To be, or not to be;" Home's "My name is Norval;" Gray's "Elegy;" Cowper's Selkirk verses; Collins's "Ode to the Passions;" Wordsworth's "We are Seven;" Moore's "'T was ever thus;" Scott's "Marmion;" Southey's "Father William" and "How the Waters came down at Lodore;" Tennyson's "Brook," "Locksley Hall," "Break, break, break!" and "Bugle Song;" Longfellow's "Excelsior;" and Poe's "Raven"? All these poems are

familiar to every lover of verse, and furnish, therefore, the most available material for the mockeries of the mimic.

It is not merely against literary sins that parody wages war; there are many occasions when this kind of wit is a legitimate weapon against human folly and wickedness, its piercing arrows succeeding where clumsier weapons fail. Nearly four centuries ago the papacy was assailed by a volume of parodies which gave it a wound more deadly than the nailing of Luther's theses to the church of Wittenberg. The famous "Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum," the authorship of which provoked as much discussion as did that of the "Letters of Junius," sent a laugh ringing through Germany more dangerous than all the broadsides of the theologians. The ignorance and superstition of the monks and the pompous pedantry of the Schoolmen were ridiculed with exquisite humor, and their style was parodied so felicitously that the monks themselves believed the Letters to be genuine, and written in their own interest, — rivalling the simplicity of the English clergyman who said of the "Rejected Addresses:" "I do not know why they should have been rejected; I think some of them were very good." In vain did the pope issue his Bull against the Letters, ordering every copy of them to be burned within three days, under penalty of the ban. The only effect of the anathema was to call the attention of thousands to the epistles who otherwise might not have heard of them; and they were read in secret with a delight which was enhanced by the very ban that was put upon them.

To conclude: artificial forms of society breed artificial forms of literature, and parody, adding, as it does, to the innocent amusements of men, must be considered a legitimate species of humor. But while this is undeniably true,

it must yet be remembered that this kind of humor, being not original, but imitative, belongs to the second class; and it argues a depraved public taste when such literary tricks and feats of intellectual jugglery are in great demand. Just in proportion as this kind of humor is serviceable and praiseworthy when properly employed, is it offensive and censurable when illegitimately used. Those who have a genius for it are too apt to forget that there are regions where it is utterly out of place, where, to a healthy mind, it is as offensive as a merry-andrew would be at a funeral, or fireworks in the chamber of death. Who to-day can tolerate those wretched parodies of Scripture which once were the favorite medium of political satire and ecclesiastical hate? Luther himself could not abstain from this kind of grim pleasantry, and gave a new version of the first verse of the first psalm as follows: "Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the way of the Sacramentarians, or sat in the seat of the Zwinglians, nor followed the counsel of the Zurichers." In the days of the Commonwealth, Cavaliers and Puritans alike availed themselves of Scripture phraseology to give zest to their caustic witticisms, and reviled each other in mock Litanies and Visitations of Sick Parliaments.

In our own day parodies, while sometimes commendable, have too often degenerated into mere vulgarity, the authors mistaking slang for wit, and buffoonery for humor. Of the dreary travesties of popular poems which are so common in the newspapers, it is hard to speak with patience. They verify the saying of Napoleon (and of Tom Paine before him) that there is but a step between the sublime and the ridiculous. Some of the most exquisite songs and passages of poetry have thus been made to excite a laugh;

and the more beautiful, the more easily burlesqued, just as the sweetest cider makes the sourest vinegar. Of all the fine pieces in our language which have been thus vulgarized, none has suffered more than Wolfe's lines on "The Burial of Sir John Moore," — one of the most solemnly touching poems in the language. A parody of this poem in the "Ingoldsby Legends," the subject of which is a drunken doctor, has been strangely pronounced the best in the language; but it seems to me that, in such a case, the more ingenious the parody, the greater is the offence against good taste. Longfellow's "Excelsior" has been similarly burlesqued, — a chimney-sweep being the hero of one of the parodies. Many years ago the whole of Gray's "Elegy" was thus made a vehicle of low amusement by a wretch in the London "Law Magazine," who turned the poem into an elegy upon briefless barristers. One verse still lingers in my memory: —

> "But ah! to them no clerk his golden page,
> Rich with retaining fees, did e'er unroll;
> Chill negligence repressed their legal rage,
> And froze the quibbling current of the soul."

Who can read with any relish such imitations as this of a verse in "The May Queen," by the author of the "Bon Gaultier Ballads"? —

> "You may lay me in my bed, mother, — my head is throbbing sore;
> And prithee, mother, let the sheets be duly aired before;
> And if you'd do a kindness to your poor, desponding child,
> Draw me a pot of beer, mother, — and, mother, draw it mild."

We have had during this generation a "Comic History of England," a "Comic History of Rome," a "Comic Blackstone," and so forth, *ad nauseam;* we have had burlesques in which the fairy tales that have charmed the imaginations

of thousands are turned into low pot-house jests; and who knows that we shall not have a comic Bible? It would be difficult to name a surer sign of intellectual barrenness than these dreary attempts at humor; for what kind of wit is so cheap as this vulgarizing of things consecrated in our memories by beautiful or lofty associations? What other means of raising a laugh so sure and so easy as to roll a statue from its pedestal, and stick some vulgar utensil in its place? "The hand that cannot rear a hovel may destroy a palace," and a dunce may have inventiveness enough to place the gravest things in a ridiculous light. There is surely enough of actual absurdity in the world to laugh at, without turning everything serious into fun. While he levels his shafts at human wickedness and folly, the satirist is the moralist's ally, as he is also the reformer's herald. But let him remember that whatever appeals to man's best sympathies and holiest feelings cannot be travestied without desecration, and that the keenest wit will not atone for the profanation of words or things which are identified with pious thoughts and lofty deeds.

CHAPTER VII.

PUNS AND PUNSTERS.

The seeds of punning are in the minds of all men. — ADDISON.

Hard is the job to launch the desperate pun, —
A pun-job dangerous as the Indian one. — O. W. HOLMES.

BARROW, in his noted definition of wit, says that sometimes it "playeth in words and phrases, taking advantage from the ambiguity of their sense or the affinity of their sound." We have here a notice of the verbal jest which the Greeks termed παρονομασία, or punning. No form of wit has been more vehemently denounced, not only by the atrabilious jesticide, but by professed lovers of wit. The pun has been stigmatized as of "a low order," as "radically bad," and of "ill repute;" but why it should provoke such hostility when legitimately employed, is an enigma hard to explain. There are few persons who do not betray, if they do not avow, a keen relish for this species of jest, when it is used sparingly and is really extempore, and not a cut-and-dry impromptu, which the author has kept, *à la* Sheridan, in a corner of his brain for weeks, to be sprung upon the first unsuspecting victim whom he may catch within ear-shot. Shakspeare says that —

> "The fool hath planted in his memory
> An army of words;"

and certainly there is no greater nuisance in society than the conversational trickster, who, instead of discussing a

subject rationally, twists and tortures it most unnaturally, in order to suit a word or phrase which he has kept in pickle for the purpose. But what man of sense judges of an art by the performances of false professors, quacks, and bunglers, who bring it into contempt? In punning, as in poetry, there is no half-success. As Horace says: —

"Qui paulum summo decessit, vergit ad imum;"

and mediocrity is hateful to gods and men. Of all miscarriages, an abortive pun is the most pitiful; it is the very quintessence of inanity; yet the cold-blooded professional punster, who is always on the watch for double meanings, seizing the smallest equivocal terms as certain animals snap at flies, the mere "word-catcher that lives on syllables," is not more offensive than any other would-be wit, or member of the great family of bores. Let us not, then, condemn these Protean combinations, "these titillators of the imagination, these awakeners of the risible faculties," when they are spontaneous and genuine, — the flashes of genius, and not the pseudo *bons mots* of witlings.

We are aware that now and then one meets with a scowling moralist, —

"A reasoning, self-sufficient thing,
An intellectual all-in-all," —

one of those solemn men, all of whose actions are ruled with a ruler, — from whose gravity "Newton might have deduced the law of gravitation," — who has a morbid abhorrence of "these agreeable levities," as Lamb calls them, "these twinkling corpuscula of conversation." That a Caligula should frown upon them, and even order an actor to be burned alive for making an offensive pun in an Atellane play, is not surprising; but that a Johnson or a Sydney

Smith should disparage this harmless species of jest, is strange indeed. Everybody remembers the hackneyed saying of Boswell's hero, which, with a persistence worthy of a better cause, is thrown into the teeth of every punster, that "a man who would make a pun would pick a pocket;" but not every one is aware that this great jesticide and hilarifuge, this very pun-deriding pundit, was guilty twice at least of the very offence he so sternly reprobated. Visiting St. Andrews College shortly after that institution had made itself infamous by selling its honors, the doctor asked the provost how it was prospering. The latter replied that it was poor. "Well," said the pun-proscribing doctor, "you have only to keep on as you have begun, and you will get rich *by degrees!*" Again, when Mrs. Barbauld was introduced to the great moralist, he growled out in his wonted Ursa Major way: "*Bare*-bald! why that's the very pleonasm of baldness!" — so much easier is it to preach than to practise.

Again, Sydney Smith professed to despise puns; yet who better than he knew how affinity of sound in words and phrases enriches expression? When he was shown in London a block of American ice, did he not say that he was glad to see anything *solvent* come from America; and did he not once protest that the hams at his table were the only true hams, — all others were Shems and Japhets? What, again, was his observation to Bobus, his brother, when the latter had chided him for an imprudent letter in the "Times" (an observation related to me by an English barrister who in his boyhood had heard it from Sydney's own lips), but a pun? "Oh, dear!" the wit exclaimed as he sank into an arm-chair, "how foolish I am getting to be in my old age, to be sure! I am just like a razor, — always *in*

hot water, and always getting into *scrapes*." What, again, was his famous hit at the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's, who, he said, "had only *to put their heads together*, and the wooden pavement for the court would be completed," but a pun? In Miss Hamilton's lectures on Education there is a story of a boy who was so very negligent that he never could be brought properly to read the word "patriarchs;" whenever he met with it he pronounced it *partridges*. A friend of Miss Hamilton remarked to her that it could hardly be considered as a piece of negligence merely, for it appeared to him that "the boy was *making game* of the patriarchs." In spite of his professed antipathy to *équivoques*, it is evident that Sydney Smith, who quotes this story in his "Moral Philosophy," keenly relished this specimen of a "perfect pun."

The enemy of puns forgets that it is really a species of reasoning, — a mock-argument, as Whately calls it, founded on a palpable equivocation of the middle term. It is forgotten, too, that it can claim the sanction of sages, poets, philosophers, orators, and statesmen. There are puns in Egyptian hieroglyphics, where, with sly reference, no doubt, to the quacks, a duck stands for a doctor. Being one of the oldest forms of wit, as well as one of the most innocent, the pun is likely to live as long as men have risibles to be tickled, and language has equivocal words that agree in sound but differ in sense. The antipathy of some men to it is due, no doubt, simply to an absolute incapacity to apprehend a joke. Hood has very naturally accounted for the bigotry of the "verbal Unitarians" by suggesting that it is no wonder that persons who with difficulty comprehend *one* sense of a word should be offended at *two*. It is probable that no man ever condemned a good pun who was able

to make one himself. Anagrams, acrostics, charades, chronograms, *bouts rimés*, and other such species of false wit have fretted their brief hour on the stage, and now are heard no more. But the pun is still in favor, and when judiciously used gives a fillip and a zest to conversation and to oratory which nothing else can impart. If, as Swift declared, that man is a benefactor of his species who causes two blades of grass to grow where but one grew before, shall we not commend the humorist who gives two meanings to a word where others give but one?

In the social circle an aptitude for punning is of priceless value. Who cannot recall occasions when a pun startled a dull, apathetic company from its torpidity, flashed new light on a dark and hackneyed subject, turned the flank of a troublesome talk, put in good humor people who were snarling at one another, gave a keen edge to truth or a quietus to error, or reminded some puffed-up Sir Oracle that he was fallible? The poet Praed, in enumerating the virtues of Quince, the crusty old Devonshire bachelor, who under a rough exterior had a heart sound and tender, says: —

> "Welcome was he in hut and hall,
> To maids and matrons, peers and peasants;
> *He won the sympathies of all*
> *By making puns* and making presents.
> Though all the parish were at strife,
> He kept his counsel and his carriage,
> And laughed, and loved a quiet life,
> And shrank from Chancery suits and — marriage."

Let us remember that there are puns which are more than a play upon words. They present a humorous, and even a valuable, idea; as, for example, in the saying that the world was ruled first by *canons*, and then by *cannons*,

— first by *Saint Peter*, then by *saltpetre*. So with the order of Douglas Jerrold: "Waiter, bring a bottle of *old* port; mind, *old* port, not *elder*." The same may be said of "Peter Porcupine's" comment on Brougham's wish that a time would come when every man in England would read Bacon. Cobbett said that he would be contented if a time came when every man in England would eat *bacon*. There was more than a verbal jest in the *jeu de mot* of Chief-Justice Parsons, of Massachusetts, made when one White, a member of the bar, published a volume of "Commentaries." "Why," asked the great lawyer, when the merits of the work had been discussed in his presence, "is this book like a tessellated pavement?" After the other disciples of Coke had "given it up," he replied: "Because it is made up of a good deal of *Blackstone*, and a little bit of *White*." Is there not sadly suggestive truth in this: "Is life worth living? That depends on the *liver*." How happily did Sydney Smith, the anti-punster, characterize Lord Brougham by a pun as he rode by in his carriage, on the panel of which was a large B, surrounded by a coronet: "There goes a carriage with a B outside, and a wasp within!"

Puns are sometimes a safety-valve for excited feelings when a man is smarting under misfortune, or stung by disgrace or neglect. "God forgive me for such bad puns!" wrote the brave Sir Charles James Napier in an indignant letter; "but a bitter feeling sometimes turns to humor to avoid cursing."

Homer does not disdain to make the crafty Ulysses save his life and that of his companions by means of a pun. Sophocles, Æschylus, and Aristophanes not seldom punned. Diogenes the Cynic perpetrated so happy an *équivoque* on

a damsel's eye which the profligate Didymus undertook to cure that Joseph Scaliger declared he would rather have been author of it than King of Navarre. The Romans, who were literary imitators of the Greeks, excelled them in punning. If to indulge in this species of jest is folly, the offender may point to Cæsar, Cicero, Ovid, Plautus, and Terence as his companions in folly. The great Roman orator was particularly fond of punning, and employed it for oratorical effect, — sometimes with signal felicity, as when he ironically complimented a senator who had formerly been a tailor, by quoting a proverbial expression of Plautus, "rem acu tetigisti" (you have handled the subject acutely). This was a familiar form of compliment; but to say to such a public speaker, "You have pricked the thing with a needle," which was the literal meaning of the words, and the sense intended to be conveyed by Cicero, was a stinging sarcasm. In one of his philipics against Verres, Cicero puns again and again upon his name. The point of Horace's Seventh Satire, Book I., which relates a quarrel between Persius and Rupilius *Rex* (king), lies in a play upon the latter's surname: —

> "Per magnos, Brute, deos te
> Oro, qui reges consueris tollere, cur non
> Hunc *Regem* jugulas?"

cries Persius ("By the great gods, I beseech thee, Brutus, why, as thou hast been wont to destroy kings, dost thou not cut the throat of this king?"), — "a miserable clench," says Dryden, and he might have added, based on a blunder, since it was *Junius* Brutus, not Marcus, as Persius supposes, who banished Tarquin. Again, in Epistle I., 13, in which Vinius Asella is directed how to carry and present to the emperor several rolls of the poet's writings, Horace puns upon his

messenger's name, and tells him to beware of blundering before the courtiers, who would be sure, in that case, to rally him upon his surname of Asella (*i. e.* "little ass") —

> "Asinæque paternum
> Cognomen vertas in risum, et fabula fias."
>
> ("The tale might get abroad, and wags proclaim
> A special fitness in your family name.")

After the fall of the Roman Empire *paronomasia* continued to flourish, and even the highest dignitaries of the Church did not disdain to enliven their speech with it. It is told of Pope Gregory I. that, chancing one day, about two years before his election to the pontificate (A. D. 588), to pass through the market at Rome, he was struck by the appearance of some poor little lads who stood trembling in the expectation of being consigned to a new master. They were beautiful children, with ruddy cheeks and blue eyes, and fine yellow tresses flowing in long curls upon their shoulders. "To what nation do these poor boys belong?" asked Gregory of the slave-dealer. "They are Angles, father." "Well may they be so called, for they are as comely as angels (*Angeli*). But from what province of Britain do they come?" "From Deira, father." "Indeed," continued Gregory, speaking in Latin, "DE IRA *Dei liberandi sunt*" (from the wrath of God they are to be delivered). When, on asking the name of their king, he was told that it was Ella, or Alla, he added that *Allelujah* ought to be sung in his dominions. When Stephen Dolet, the poet-printer, whose statue is to be erected in Paris, was sentenced to be burned at the stake in 1546 for doubting the soul's immortality, he endured his doom courageously, and on the way to the fatal stake made the pun: "Non dolet ipse Dolet, sed pia turba dolet." The effect of the famous

pasquinades depended largely on puns. When Pope Urban VII., a member of the Barberini family, plundered the Pantheon of brass to make cannon for the Castle of St. Angelo, Pasquin's statue bore the following inscription:

"Quod non fecerunt Barbari Romæ fecit Barberini."
(What the Barbarians did not do at Rome, the Barberini did.)

The fountain-head of modern punning must be looked for in Italy, where the practice originated after the Revival of Learning in the fifteenth century, whence it spread into all the countries of Europe. In England the golden age of the art was the Augustan age of English literature, — the reigns of Elizabeth and James I., when the punning mania rivalled in its extravagance the tulip mania of Holland. Clergymen punned in the pulpit, judges upon the bench, statesmen at the council-board, and even criminals in their dying speeches. King James himself was an inveterate punster, and made few bishops or privy councillors that had not at some time signalized themselves by a clench or a conundrum. Of Shakspeare it has been said that a pun was the Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it. He scattered quibbles and clenches broadcast throughout his plays, not only putting them into the mouths of fools, porters, etc., but making them drop from the lips of dukes and earls and of the weird sisters, the "secret, black, and midnight hags," in "Macbeth." Some of his dialogues are an incessant, rattling fire of puns, and he evidently chuckled sometimes over a "shocking bad" *jeu de mot* with more gust than over his grandest flights of imagination. In the "Merchant of Venice" we have such *équivoques* as this: —

"I should be still
Peering in maps for ports and *piers* and roads."

and this: —

> "Not on thy *sole*, but on thy *soul*, harsh Jew,
> Thou makest thy knife keen;"

Many comic scenes in the great dramatist — "the civil war of wits" between Boyet and his ladies, between Biron and Rosaline, Mercutio and Romeo, Benedick and Beatrice — hinge especially upon the play and perversion of words; and this, as Gervinus, one of Shakspeare's ablest commentators, observes, is the foundation for wit common in every age. This form was cultivated among the English people according to an established custom, which invested jocose conversation with the character of a regular battle. "A word or a sentence is snatched from the mouth of an adversary whom it is wished to provoke, and turned or perverted into a weapon against him; he parries the thrust and strikes back, espying a similar weakness in his adversary's ward. The longer the battle is sustained, the better; he who can do no more, is vanquished. In 'Love's Labor's Lost,' Armado names this war of words an *argument;* it is described as like a game at tennis, where the words are hurled, caught, and thrown back again, and where the loser is he who allows the word, like the ball, to drop. This war of wit is compared to a battle; that between Boyet and Biron, for example, to a sea-fight. . . . What we know of Shakspeare's social life reveals to us this same kind of jesting in his personal intercourse."[1] To-day the poet seems to have fewer of these conceits than he actually has, because the point of many of his puns is lost to us through the changes that have taken place in the pronunciation of many words since his day.

The lofty genius of Milton did not disdain to stoop to a

[1] Shakspeare Commentaries, by Dr. G. G. Gervinus.

play upon words, even in his grave epic; but it is not so much puns that he indulges in as in what the Italians call "conceits:" as, "*Highly* they raged against the *Highest*." Dryden disliked the pun personal, and was greatly offended when, as he was standing in a coffee-house with his back toward Rowe, a friend said to him: "You are like a waterman; you look one way, and *Rowe* another." But though unwilling to be a target for this kind of jest, he did not hesitate to sprinkle puns over all his dramatic works. The punning mania culminated in the reign of James I., and began to abate in the days of Queen Anne, when Swift, Pope, and Addison attacked it with such vehemence and vigor as to banish these *jeux d'esprit* from the judge's bench, pulpits, and drawing-rooms, where they had been offensively prevalent for nearly a century. Addison in the "Spectator" described a society of persons who had established an infirmary for the cure of all defects of temper and breaches of good manners. "After dinner, a very honest fellow chancing to let a pun fall from him, his neighbor cried out: 'To the infirmary!' at the same time pretending to be sick at it, as having the same natural antipathy to a pun which some have to a cat." Swift led the anti-punning crusade in a pamphlet entitled "God's Revenge against Punning;" yet a more inveterate punster never punished the king's English than this same Dean of St. Patrick's, who was the hierarch, the pontifex, the Magnus Apollo of the punning tribe, and had defended it in ringing rhymes, declaring it —

> "Quite legitimate fun
> To be blazing away at every one
> With a regular, double-loaded gun."

It was Swift, we believe, who, seeing a carpenter fall through the roof of a house which he was finishing, observed with icy

coolness that he liked to see a man *go through his work* cleverly, — a saying in perfect keeping with the dean's cynical and morose temper.

That puns have a real value is proved by the fact that so many men of genius have employed them, and by the consideration that if, from the most striking examples of wit recorded in literature, we deduct those the point of which lies in a play upon words, hardly a fourth part of the most brilliant epigrams, retorts, and *bons mots* will be left. Charles Lamb, who was himself a unique punster, declares that "a pun is a noble thing *per se;* it is entire, and fills the mind; it is as perfect as a sonnet." This is emphatically true of his stammering reply to the constable who told him that eight persons had dined in a certain spire. "Eight persons!" said "Elia," looking up at the spire. "Well, they must have been a very sh-sh-sharp set."

Lamb was so partial to puns that he prized even imperfect ones. "A pun," he says in one of his most idiosyncratic and felicitous papers, "is not bound by the laws which limit nicer wit. It is a pistol let off at the ear, not a feather to tickle the intellect. It is an antic which does not stand upon manners, but comes bounding into the presence, and does not show the less comic for being dragged in sometimes by the head and shoulders. . . . This species of wit is the better for not being perfect in all its parts. What it gains in completeness, it loses in naturalness. The more exactly it satisfies the critical, the less hold it has upon some other faculties. The puns which are most entertaining are those which will least bear an analysis. Of this kind is the following, recorded, with a sort of stigma, in Swift's Miscellanies: An Oxford scholar, meeting a porter who was carrying a hare through the streets, accosts him

with this extraordinary question: 'Prithee, friend, is that your *own hare*, or a *wig?*' There is no excusing this, and no resisting it. A man might blur ten sides of paper in attempting a defence of it against a critic who should be laughter-proof."

There have been men in whom a passion for punning has been compatible with the deepest sympathy and the intensest feeling, and who by this form of jest have provoked the minds of their hearers to philosophic speculation. An example of the latter is Burke's query: "What is (m)ajest(y), when stripped of its externals, but a jest?" This great statesman and profound thinker was a brilliant punster, and some of his classic witticisms, which turned upon the pivot of a pun, were worthy of Porson or Parr. When his friend the Rev. Dr. Marlay was appointed to the deanery of Ferns, — "I do not like the name," said Burke, "it sounds so like a *barren* title." When some one asked whether the Isle of Man was worth going to see, Burke replied: "By all means; 'the proper study of mankind is *Man*.'" Charles James Fox did not scorn "the merry, social, urbane pun," as his commentary on a passage in the Psalms plainly shows. When asked what was the meaning of the verse, "He clothed himself with cursing like as with a garment," Fox replied: "I think it is clear enough; the man had a *habit* of swearing." Plunket, the celebrated Irish statesman, advocate, and scholar, — who is said to have been master of every species of wit, from the flash which lights up an argument or intensifies a thought, to the droll conceit or comic suggestion which plays round the heartstrings, and aims only to raise a merry laugh, — was one of the readiest and happiest of punsters. A violent storm having sprung up on the day when Lord Campbell,

who had superseded him as Lord Chancellor of Ireland, was expected to arrive from England, a friend of Plunket remarked to him that the passage across the Channel would make Campbell sick of his promotion. "Yes," ruefully rejoined his predecessor; "but it won't make him *throw up the seals.*"

Erskine, the eloquent defender of Stockdale and Horne Tooke, often employed a pun with telling effect. Being asked one day if he had "any old clo's to sell," by a Jew's boy who had been hired to ask the question, as the great advocate was going with a bag full of briefs to Westminster Hall, he replied: "No, you little Hebrew imp; they are all new *suits.*" Being told by his friend Maylem at Ramsgate that his physician had ordered him not to bathe, — "Oh! then, you are *malum prohibitum.*" "My wife," rejoined the other, "does bathe." "Oh! then, she is *malum in se,*" exclaimed the witty advocate. When a punctilious friend of Curran's, on hearing a person say "curosity," exclaimed, "How that man murders the English language!" the advocate retorted: "Not so bad; he has only knocked an *i* out."

I have already spoken of Canning's wit; he was almost as happy in *paronomasia* as in irony. Quick, easy, and fluent, now passionate and sarcastic, now light and playful, he was an adept in all the arts by which an audience such as he usually addressed — half-lounging and sleepy, half-serious and awake — was to be caught and retained. In a contest with Lord Lyndhurst, that noble lord — having borrowed most of his speech from a popular pamphlet written by Dr. Philpotts — was overthrown by Canning, amid shouts of laughter, by a quotation from the old song: —

"'Dear Tom, this brown jug that now foams with mild ale,
Out of which I now drink to sweet Nan of the vale,'
Was once *Toby Philpot.*"

When Lord Londonderry told Canning of a Dutch picture he had seen, in which all the antediluvian animals were issuing from Noah's ark, the elephant last, — "That, of course," said Canning; "he had been packing up his *trunk.*"

Lord Brougham found time, when not thundering in the House of Lords, giving judgments as Chancellor, or addressing scientific institutions, to perpetrate a pun. Once at a convivial party, after the bottle had been pushed round freely, a gentleman not overstocked with sense or shrewdness was asked to sing. He excused himself on the ground that music was not in his constitution. "Nonsense!" cried Jeffrey; "every one can see that you have a singing face." "Ay, ay!" added Brougham, with more wit than grace, "the notes of music are even developed there, for I can see *A flat* in it." The able Garrow was once cross-examining a prevaricating old woman, by whom he strove to prove that a tender of money had been made. Sympathizing with the baffled barrister, the witty Joseph Jekyll threw to him a scrap of paper, on which was written: —

"Garrow, forbear; that tough old jade
Will never prove a *tender made.*"

William Wirt, the eminent American lawyer, orator, and author, tells a friend in a letter of a pun which, he says, made him laugh vociferously. "There is a gentleman in —— who is otherwise very handsome, but with the misfortune of having a nose without a bridge, — a mere abortive proboscis. C. was remarking in company one day the noble expression of his countenance. 'Oh, but that unfortunate nose!' said

a lady. 'Nose?' replied C.; 'if it had a *bridge*, it would be very *passable*.'" When Horne Tooke was asked by George III. whether he ever played cards, — "I cannot, your Majesty, tell a king from a knave," was the reply. Franklin, though he had a terse and caustic wit, rarely punned; yet when he and his associates signed the Declaration of Independence he observed: "We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately." Foote, the comedian, was a passed-master of punning. Being asked if he had ever seen Cork, he replied: "No; but I have seen many *drawings* of it," — a jest which may remind the reader of one of Archbishop Whately's *jeux d'esprit*. When Dr. Gregg, who had recently been made Bishop of Cork, was dining with Whately, and was allowing the wine to stand too long in front of him, the Archbishop quaintly said: "Come, though you are John Cork, you must not stop the bottle here." Gregg, with equal aptness, replied: "I see your Grace is determined *to draw me out*."

Persons who know Whately only by his grave works on logic, political economy, and theology, little suspect that in society he was one of the most persistent punsters, who let no occasion for playing upon words pass unimproved. Like many other clerical dignitaries, he sought for inspiration in the "soveraine weed." Dr. Parr was the most inveterate smoker of his own day; but Whately boasted of being "above Parr," and often shocked the Dublin exquisites, who dangled around the Lord Lieutenant, by smoking a long clay pipe as he sat on the chains in front of his house in St. Stephen's Green, or sauntered along the Donnybrook Road. He keenly enjoyed their horror at the uncanonical exhibition, and smoked steadily on, saying that he sympathized with Horace's desire, "ex fumo dare lucem." When

a person spoke to him one day of the new and improved treatment of lunatics, and mentioned that gardening was found to be a good occupation for them, — "I should doubt that," said his Grace; "they might *grow madder*." He once confounded a horse-dealer who was trying to sell him a very powerful steed. "There is nothing, your Grace," said the dealer, "which he cannot draw." "Can he draw an inference?" quietly inquired the author of "The Elements of Logic." Referring to the Rev. Maurice Day and Mr. Morrow, the Mudie of the Irish capital, he said that "the ladies of Dublin ran *to-day* for a sermon, and *to-morrow* for a novel." It was Whately who said that Noah's ark was made of gopher-wood, but Joan of Arc was maid of Orleans. Some of the most mirth-provoking conundrums that are familiar to us fell from his lips. At a meeting of the famine-board at Dublin, Dr. Whately asked his next neighbor, "Why is Ireland the richest country in the world? Because its *capital* is always *Dublin*." Again, "Why can a man never starve in the Great Desert? Because he can eat the *sand which is* there. But what brought the sandwiches there? Why, Noah sent *Ham*, and his descendants *mustered and bred*." The Archbishop's mind, like the pendulum of a clock, needed but the slightest touch to set the pun-making machinery in motion. He recreated and refreshed his mind after toil with these pleasantries, just as he worked his arms round and round like a windmill for the same purpose, threw pebbles at birds, or romped with his frolicsome dogs.

Lord Macaulay was once overcome by an irresistible propensity to pun, and wagered that he could make two hundred puns in an evening. He did them in two hours; but most of them were "miserably bad." William the

Silent, with all his gravity and taciturnity, and weighed down, as he was, with heavy cares and responsibilities, deigned once to pun on his baldness. "Scito me," said he, "non magis capite quam corde *calvum* esse." The conversation and writings of the old English divines, it is well known, reeked and rioted with puns. One of the most telling ever made was uttered by Dr. Mountain, chaplain to Charles II. Being asked one day by that monarch to whom he should present a certain bishopric just then vacant: "If you had but faith, sire," replied he, "I could tell you whom." "How so," said Charles, "if I had but faith?" "Why, yes," said the witty but irreverent divine, "your Majesty might then say *to this* MOUNTAIN, *be thou removed into that See.*" Among the Masters of Balliol College, Oxford, in the eighteenth century was a noted wit and punster, Dr. Theophilus Leigh, whose conversation was a perennial stream of jests and retorts. When some one told him that in a late dispute among the Privy Councillors the Lord Chancellor struck the table with such violence that he split it, Dr. Leigh replied: "No, no; I can hardly persuade myself that he *split the table*, though I believe he *divided the Board.*" Almost in death the ruling passion triumphed. Being told in his last sickness that a friend had been lately married, that he had recovered from a long illness by eating eggs, and that the wits said he had been *egged* on to matrimony, the doctor at once trumped the joke by adding: "Then may the *yoke* sit easy on him!"

One of the most incorrigible punsters of the olden time in New England was Dr. Mather Byles, a man with whom, in spite of his opposite politics, Sydney Smith, had he known him, would have keenly enjoyed a "twa-handed crack."

Dr. Byles was born in Boston in 1706, and was first pastor of the church in Hollis Street. He was an ardent lover of literature, and corresponded with Pope, Lansdowne, and Watts. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he avoided politics in the pulpit, expressing always a mortal abhorrence of the John Owens and Hugh Peterses, the Kettle-drumbs, Poundtexts, and Macbriars, that so often, as he thought, disgraced the sacred desk. Many anecdotes are told illustrating the sharpness of his wit, and especially his readiness at pun or repartee. It is related of him that —

"Once, having been arrested as an enemy to his country, he was sentenced to confinement, and a guard placed over him. Afterward he was set free, and then again placed under a sentinel, and finally freed again. In speaking of these transactions, he said that 'he had been *guarded*, *reguarded*, and *disreguarded*.' Opposite his house there was a very bad slough in wet weather. One day two of the selectmen, who had the care of the streets, stuck fast in this hole as they were driving in a chaise, and had to get out into the mud to extricate their vehicle. In the midst of their struggles the waggish divine appeared at his door, and, bowing profoundly, cried out: 'Gentlemen, I have repeatedly complained to you of this nuisance, without any attention being paid to it. I am very glad to see you *stirring in the matter* now.' During the famous dark day in 1780, which excited in some timid minds a great deal of alarm, a superstitious old lady, residing near the doctor, sent her daughter to inquire if he could account for the phenomenon. 'My dear,' he replied, 'you will give my compliments to your mamma, and tell her I am as much *in the dark* as she is.' A ship from London brought three hundred street-lamps for the town of Boston. On the same day a female neighbor, who was 'a new light,' with a weak mind and a whining manner, called to see Dr. Byles. Desiring to be rid of the visitor, he asked if she had heard the news. 'Oh, no, dear doctor! what news?' 'Why, three hundred *new lights* have come over in the ship from London this morning.' 'Bless me! I had not

heard of it.' 'Yes, and the selectmen have ordered them to be *put in irons* immediately.' The visitor instantly hurried away to make further inquiries."

Once the witty old Tory divine met with his match. Having paid his addresses unsuccessfully to a lady who afterward married a Mr. Quincy, the disappointed suitor, on meeting her, said: "So, madam, it appears you prefer a *Quincy* to *Byles*." "Yes," was the reply; "for if there had been anything worse than *biles*, God would have afflicted Job with them."

Even great military chieftains have not disdained, in the very moment of victory, to perpetrate puns, and it is curious that two admirable ones, one of them a classic clench that has few superiors (see p. 259), are said to have been made by British generals, when flushed with triumph, in the East Indies. "I am in *Luck-now*," wrote Havelock, on capturing that stronghold from the Sepoys during the great Mutiny of 1857. Puns, again, have been a convenient mode, in times of fierce party strife, of insinuating sentiments which could not, without danger, have been expressed openly. "God send this *crumb well* down!" (Cromwell,—pronounced *Crumwell*) was a favorite toast of the Cavaliers, as they tossed off a glass of wine with a bit of bread in it, during the reign of the Lord Protector of England. In the days of the bigoted and tyrannical Archbishop Laud, a popular sentiment was, "Great praise to God, and little Laud to the Devil." One of the happiest forms of this kind of wit is where there is a union of double meaning in the phrase, with an analogy in the ideas expressed. Thus a witness in a law-case was asked: "On what authority, sir, do you swear to the mare's age?" "On the best authority." "Then why don't you say what it is?" urged the

impatient lawyer. "Well, to speak the truth," replied the witness, "I had it from the mare's own mouth." Similar to this was the saying of some one concerning a parasite, who was also a scandal-monger, that he never opened his mouth but at the expense of the public. James Smith, one of the authors of "Rejected Addresses," excelled in this species of jest. Speaking of an author who, since obtaining a pension, had ceased to write, he observed that he was a *pen-shunner;* and it was he who, in an impromptu written at Gore House, referring to Wilberforce's visits there, said: —

> "Yet here still Slavery attacks
> Whom Blessington invites;
> The chains from which he freed the Blacks
> She fastens on the Whites."

But one of the most felicitous sayings attributed to Smith was uttered by Poole, "one of the best punsters," says Abraham Hayward, "as well as one of the cleverest comic writers of the day." An actor named Priest was playing at one of the London theatres. Some one remarked at the Garrick Club that there were a great many men in the pit. "Probably clerks who have taken *Priest's orders*," said Poole. Among recent English puns one of the best is that of the editor who said that if the devil should lose his tail, he could get another where *bad spirits* are *retailed.*

The effect of a pun is most telling when it is made in the form of a retort, so that no suspicion can arise in the hearer's mind of its having been coolly and carefully pre-studied, and kept in pickle for future use. What could be finer than the reply made by a lawyer at a Dudleian lecture in Cambridge, when the lecturer, in allusion to the "Vestiges of Creation," then recently published, had expressed a doubt

of the alleged production of winged insects from pulverized brimstone by electricity, on the ground that the experiment had never been successfully repeated. "Winged insects not produced from silicious stone!" exclaimed the disciple of Coke; "why, the doctor's beside himself. Always, when the flint is struck by steel, it makes the *fire*-fly!"

But the corypheus of punsters, in verse or prose, the Jupiter in the firmament of fun, before whose dazzling scintillations all other luminaries "pale their ineffectual fires," was Thomas Hood. He punned, not by an effort, or to provoke barren laughter, but instinctively, as birds sing or dogs bark, because he could not help it, uttering his merry quips with his very last breath, as he wrote to Sir Robert Peel that "Death stops my pen, but not my *pension*," and declared to his friends that he was dying out of charity to his undertaker, who wanted to "urn a lively Hood!" In "Hood's Own," in which the drollest whims and oddities of the text are illustrated by equally comic illustrations, he revels in a sea of queer and funny suggestion. The puns and merry conceits go fizzing about like squibs and crackers on a Fourth of July evening. His verses, it has been aptly said, "contained poetry at one end, and puns at the other. Every drop of ink from his pen swarmed into life with the most fantastic shapes ever assumed by the merriest imps of mirth and mischief." His word-wit was wholly different from that of most word-twisters; it was not a mere play upon words, — the sudden contact and explosion of two opposite ideas, — but a source of genuine humor, and even at times of the deepest pathos. A more striking example has rarely been seen than he exhibited of the close neighborhood of these two qualities, —

of exquisite sensibility to the softness of the rose, and to the pungency of the nettle. Not the least impressive thing in the "Song of the Shirt" is its half-jesting tone, — the pun or two which Hood, with a skilful and sparing hand, has dropped into the centre of this condensed tragedy.

It is the great merit of Hood that there was, amid all his exuberant fancies, quaint quips, and droll conceits, a spirit of beauty in his fun, and of humanity in his drollery. Cant, hypocrisy, pretension, and vice provoked his irony and ridicule; but his shafts — to his eternal honor be it said — were never hurled against things that men ought to reverence; his heart was too true to mock at real piety, unaffected modesty, and sterling worth. He had no sarcasms, none of the bitterness of satire; he indulged in no cynical horse-laugh at humanity's sins and backslidings. In his "Ode to Rae Wilson," the canting, toadying, time-serving spirit of the age, of the men who —

> "Think they are pious when they are only bilious,"

is mercilessly exposed; yet, though he ties hypocrisy to his horse's heels and trails it round the list, — though he scourges bigotry till the vampire howls, — he does not forget the humanity of the hypocrite or the bigot.

The happiest of Hood's punning verses are "Faithless Nelly Gray" and "Faithless Sally Brown:" —

> "Ben Battle was a soldier bold,
> And used to war's alarms;
> But a cannon-ball took off his *legs*,
> So he laid down his *arms*.
>
> "And as they took him off the field,
> Cried he: 'Let others shoot;
> For here I leave my second leg,
> And the Forty-second Foot.'"

When Nelly saw Ben's wooden legs, she began "to take them off;" upon which Ben exclaims: —

"'O Nelly Gray! O Nelly Gray!
Is this your love so warm?
The love that loves a scarlet coat
Should be more uniform!'"

To which Nelly replies: —

"'Before you had those timber toes,
Your love I did allow;
But then, you know, you stand upon
Another footing now!'"

At the end of the ballad of "Faithless Sally Brown" we are told that Ben "had met with many a breeze before, but never such a *blow*" as her infidelity to him, and that

"Then reading on his 'bacco-box,
He heaved a heavy sigh,
And then began to eye his pipe,
And then to pipe his eye.

"And then he tried to sing 'All 's Well!'
But could not, though he tried;
His head was turn'd, and so he chew'd
His pigtail till he died.

"His death, which happen'd in his berth,
At forty-odd befell;
They went and told the sexton,
And the sexton toll'd the bell."

What can be more comic than Hood's account, in the "Tale of a Trumpet," of —

"Mrs. F.,
So very deaf
That she might have worn a percussion-cap
And been knock'd on the head without hearing it snap;"

or that of Dame Eleanor Spearing, who was as —

> "Deaf to sounds as a ship out of soundings,
> Deaf to verbs and all their compoundings,
> Adjective, noun, and adverb, and particle,
> Deaf to even the definite article."

The drollery of Hood's puns in the social circle was enhanced by the inexpressible gravity of the upper part of his face, while his mouth was twitching with smiles. When Charles Lamb, supping at Hood's, was asked what part of the roast fowl he would take, and replied, "Back; I — I always prefer back," Hood, laying down his knife and fork, exclaimed: "By heavens! I could not have believed it if anybody else had sworn it." "Believe what?" said Mrs. Hood anxiously, and coloring to the temples, fancying she had served "Elia" ill. "Believe what? Why, madam, that Charles Lamb was a *backbiter*," replied the rogue, with one of his short, quick laughs, while Lamb burst into a fit of mirth. When Hood's foot swelled so that he could hardly touch the ground, he comforted himself with the reflection that it could not be a long-standing complaint like the gout. He asserted that a certain trembling of his hand in weakness was not palsy, but an inclination to shake hands. He was so thin that he could drink nothing that was thick, and thought that he would have to stick his poor spider legs, like piles, in the sea-mud, — to get mussels to them. In "Hood's Own" the wit tells us that in his youth he sat at a desk in some commercial office, but was not destined to become a winner of the Ledger. Of Mrs. Fry he says that he likes her and the Quakers, with many of their works and ways; but he does n't like her "Newgatory teaching." It is a singular fact that, thin and spectral-looking as Hood was, he liked to write about fat people; as, for example, his caricature of John Day, —

"The biggest man
Of all the coachman kind;
With back too broad to be conceived
By any narrow mind."

He fell in love with a pretty barmaid, and offered himself to her, "with all his fat:" —

"Said she: 'My taste will never lean
To like so huge a man;
So I must beg you to come here
As little as you can.'"

The English language, owing to its composite character, is eminently favorable to punning. There are in English several classes of equivocal words; as, 1. Where the same form has several meanings. 2. Where two words with different meanings are pronounced alike, though spelled differently. 3. Where words are spelled differently, and pronounced nearly but not quite alike. 4. Where a phrase, consisting of two or more words, may be used equivocally. An example of the first is furnished by a story told by Dean Ramsay of a Scotch clergyman who, having to preach away from home, was caught in a shower of rain. On reaching the kirk he got a friend to rub down his clothes, and anxiously asked if he thought he was *dry* enough. "Never fear," was the reply; "you'll be dry enough when you get into the pulpit." Another example is the reply of the author of the periodical paper called the "World" to a lady at church, who, seeing him look thoughtful, asked what he was thinking of, — "The next World." An idle fellow, who had only fourpence, which had been put by to pay for the baking of some meat for his dinner, used it to buy a new string for his guitar. An old acquaintance, on hearing of this, repeated from "L'Allegro" these lines: —

"And ever against *eating* cares
Lap me in soft Lydian airs."

An example of the second class may be found in the remark of Theodore Hook when told of an author who invited his publisher to dinner and treated him to many kinds of wine: "Then I suppose he poured his wine-*cellar* into his book-*seller*." To the third class belong such *jeux de mots* as this: A lady observed that her doctor had put her on a new *regiment*, and allowed her to drink nothing but water. "Ah!" replied a hearer, "that must have been the *Cold-stream*." To the last class belongs the reply of Douglas Jerrold, when told that a dentist had repeated as his own one of that wit's jokes: "That is not strange. Don't you know that he gets his living by *taking things out of other people's mouths?*"

Punning on proper names is a practice which has prevailed in all ages of the world, or at least among all civilized nations. In Shakspeare we find the play upon names in some of the most thrilling as well as the most touching passages. Onslow, Speaker of the House of Commons in Elizabeth's reign, had *Festina lente*, and Vernon, VER NON *semper floret*, for their respective mottoes. One of the happiest puns on names was that of the poet Gay upon his own and that of Rich, the proprietor of the theatre where "The Beggar's Opera" was first played. The great success of the piece, he said, had made *Gay* rich, and *Rich* gay. The name of Alexander Nequam, abbot of Gloucester in the reign of John or Richard I., and called "the learnedest Englishman of his age," was a perpetual hone for the jesters of his time to sharpen their wits upon. Weary of hearing the innumerable puns upon Nequam, he changed his name to Neckam. Wishing at one time to become a

monk in St. Albans Abbey, he applied for admission, to which the abbot laconically replied:—

> "Si bonus sis, venias; si Nequam, nequaquam."
> (If good, you may come; if wicked, by no means.)

The torment to which this man was subjected by his unhappy name was experienced centuries afterward by a gentleman in New England, who was compelled to hear a worn-out, wearisome jest on his name in endless iteration. "When, thirty years ago," says the poet Saxe, in "Harper's Magazine," "the Rev. Mr. Ingersol, a Unitarian minister of Burlington, Vt., remarked to Mr. Haswell, one of his parishioners, that 'his name would be *as well* without the H,' the latter was delighted with the pun; but imagine the gentleman's weariness and disgust when (the joke having got abroad) every booby in town repeated the pun in his ear, either as original or borrowed, until the unlucky man wished the whole tribe of punsters in perdition." Similar to this play upon Mr. Haswell's name was what Theodore Hook deemed his own best pun, — that made to a friend who pointed out a placard bearing the inscription, half effaced, "Warren's B——." "What ought to follow," said Hook, "is *lacking*."

Dr. Thomas Fuller, the old divine, was a prolific punster. Replying to an opponent, he says: "As for other spots and stains on my soul, I hope (be it spoken without the least verbal reflection) that He who is the Fuller's soap (Malachi iii. 2) will scour them forth with his merit." Can anything be more *naïve* or amusing than the parenthesis, which calls attention to his pun by disavowing it? Wits who jest upon others' names do not usually relish puns upon their own; but Fuller was never offended by such

pleasantries. It was not because he could not enjoy a joke at his own expense that he denied the truth of the story that he once "caught a Tartar" in a certain Mr. Sparrowhawk, of whom he asked: "Pray what is the difference between an owl and a sparrowhawk?" and who replied: "Why, an owl is *fuller* in the head, *fuller* in the face, and *fuller* all over!"

When M. Neckar made his report on the French finances to Louis XVI., it was published in a cover of blue marbled paper. "Have you read the *conte bleu* [lying story]?" asked M. de Maurepas, the minister, of all who called upon him; and when he was told of the great effect the work was producing on the public, — "I know," said he, shrugging his shoulders; "we have fallen from Turgot-mancy into Nec-romancy." The following punning epigram was written on three doctors, — Dr. Wall, Sir C. Pegge, and Dr. Bourne: —

THE OXFORD MEDICAL TRIO.

I would not call in any one of them all,
For only "the weakest will go to the *wall*;"
The second, like Death, that scythe-armed mower,
Will speedily make you a *peg* or two lower;
While the third, with the fees he so silently earns,
Is the *bourn* whence no traveller ever returns.

It was a witty, if not a just, remark concerning an eminent English lawyer that Scarlett was not *deep-red* (read). Lord Brougham's name (pronounced *Broom*) and titles have been the targets of many witticisms. Byron declared that "A legal broom is a moral chimney-sweeper;" and

"'I wonder if Brougham thinks as much as he talks,'
Said a punster, perusing a trial;
'I vow, since his lordship was made Baron Vaux,
He 's been 'VAUX *et preterea nihil*.'"

The following, "On the two beautiful Miss Gunnings," is neatly turned: —

> "Sly Cupid, perceiving our modern beaux' hearts
> Were proof to the sharpest and best of his darts,
> His power to maintain, the young urchin, grown cunning,
> Has laid down his bow, and now conquers by *Gunning*."

When the great Hungarian patriot and orator, Kossuth, was in this country, he played on the name of the Alabama senator who opposed his reception by Congress, by speaking of "the inclemency of Mr. Clemens."

Some years ago there was a firm of chinamen in Warwick Street, London, Fogg and Mist, which afterward became Fogg and Son. Upon this a wag observed that "the Son had driven away the Mist!" When one Gunn complained to a friend that his attorney, in his bill, had not *let him off* easily, — "That is no wonder," was the reply, "as he *charged you* too high." Of another, Alexander Gunn, it is recorded in the custom-house books of Edinburgh, that "*A. Gunn was discharged for making a false report.*" Napoleon did not scorn to pun; commending one of his bravest generals, afterward made Comte de Lobau, "Mon *Mouton*" (sheep), he said, "c'est un lion."

A tombstone is hardly the place where we should look for a pun; but mortuary puns upon names have been common in many ages and countries. Among the best are that on the witty old divine, Fuller, — namely, "Fuller's earth;" that on the eminent barrister, Sir John Strange:

> "Here lies an honest lawyer, — that is *Strange*;"

and the epitaph on Charles Knight by Douglas Jerrold, whose wit did not always wear so courteous a dress:

> "GOOD KNIGHT."

We may add to these an epitaph in a Massachusetts graveyard, meant to be serious, on one Partridge, —

"AVOLAVIT!"

(He hath flown.)

A favorite form of pun with learned men and scholars has been the classical, which, as requiring culture for its perpetration, may be regarded as of a higher order than the ordinary clench. Drs. Parr and Porson, the famous "Grecians," excelled in this species of wit. One day when Dr. Parr was taking down some books from his shelves, a critical work by Lambert Bos fell upon a volume of Hume. "Procumbit *humi bos*," exclaimed the scholar. When some one opened the window of a room while he was suffering from a cold, he said: "That draught of air is too much; at present I am only *par levibus ventis*." When Dr. Parr sought the head-mastership of Harrow, and was opposed by one who made a long, swelling speech, a Harrow boy wittily quoted the line: —

"Si te ruperis, non *par* eris."

In the olden time it was the custom at Trinity College, Cambridge, for the scholars there to write Latin themes in hall on a given subject, which were to be ready for dinner. On one occasion the subject was, "Brutus, Cæsar interfecto, an bene fecit, aut male fecit?" Porson, then an undergraduate, came late, and scribbled on a piece of paper: "Nec bene fecit, nec male fecit, sed interfecit,"— which has rightly been pronounced one of the happiest puns ever made. Once at a supper-party he sat until the bottles were drained and the lights had gone out, when he rose, and muttered, *οὐδὲ τόδε οὐδὲ τἄλλο*. When a classical lecturer of Trinity College was laughed at for pronouncing *nimirum*

with a long accent on the first syllable, Porson is said to have defended him by saying that Horace had declared to Claudius Nero that there was only one person who really understood the word (Epist. I. ix. 1): —

"Septimius, Claudi, nimirum intellegit unus."

Sir Theodore Martin, in his translation of Horace, credits this witticism to Sir Robert Peel; and Philips, in his Life of Curran, attributes it to that witty advocate. Swift not only wrote learnedly on the "ars pun-ica," but made several capital classical puns. To an elderly gentleman who had lost his spectacles, he said: "If this rain continue all night, you will certainly recover them in the morning:

"'Nocte pluit tota, redeunt spectacula mane.'"

An excellent classical clench was uttered one day at table by a friend of Ménage, the French Johnson. Some soup having been accidentally spilled upon him, he said: "Summum jus, summa injuria." It is said that Ben Jonson, being challenged to pun on "Di-do-dum," produced, after a little thought, these lines: —

"When Dido found Æneas did not come,
She mourned in silence, and was Di-do-dum" (dumb).

What reply could be happier than that of the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, who when unjustly hissed by the undergraduates in the Senate-House, bowed to them courteously, and repeated from Horace, "Laudatur ab *his;*" or what apology neater than Burke's quotation from the "Ars Poetica," when, in an attempt to snuff a candle, he awkwardly extinguished it? —

"Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio."

This passage recalls another from the same fountain of

quotation, aptly cited when a rich and beautiful heiress married a young man of talents, but without wealth, whose name was Salmon. One of her relatives, who were all much displeased with the match, was complaining of it to a friend, who dryly answered: "All that I can say about the lady has been already said by Horace: —

"'Desinit in *piscem*, mulier formosa superne.'"

Vere Foster one day asked his learned contemporary, John Taylor, editor of Demosthenes, why he talked of selling his horse. "Because," replied the doctor, "I cannot afford to keep him in these hard times." "Then," said Foster, "you should keep a mare, as Horace advises, —

"'*Equam* memento rebus in arduis
Servare.'"

What would the fat little Roman poet, who affected disdain of popular applause, and boasted that his Satires had no vogue in the haunts of the common people, have thought if he had foreseen the extent to which his *curiosa felicitas* of expression would subserve the purposes of those *captatores verborum*, the punsters of all nations? Did he dream that not only his delicate wit and exquisite urbanity of sentiment would delight all men of taste in after ages, but that he would thus become —

"Callidus excusso populum suspendere naso?"

When Lord Sandwich, the reputed inventor of the combination of meat and bread known by his name, was entertained by the corporation of Worcester, a servant let fall a neat's tongue. On the mayor apologizing for the mishap, — "Never mind," said his Lordship, "it is only a *lapsus linguæ*." Two of the most felicitous classical puns ever

made fell impromptu, one from the lips of Napier, the hero of Scinde, and the other from those of Sir Joseph Jekyll, the noted Oriental traveller. "Peccavi!" (I have Scinde) is said to have been the single word with which the brave soldier announced that he had successfully stormed the Indian stronghold. When Jekyll was told of a young lady studying music, who had mastered thorough-bass in three months, — "Impossible!" he exclaimed; "nemo repente *turpissimus* fuit." One of the wittiest, as well as one of the most accurate and accomplished, of American scholars is Professor K., of —— University. Having one day in the class-room remarked that the Greek preposition εἰς invariably means "into," he was reminded by one of his pupils that a professor in another college asserted the contrary. "Well," was the reply, "if that is true, I can only say that he has slipped up on the εἰς [ice], that is all." A Mr. Cole having left money, in his will, to erect St. Clement's Church in Cambridge, England, on condition that his name should be plainly inscribed on the exterior of the tower, the following words were placed there: —

"COLE : DEUM ;"

i. e., "Worship God."

It is sometimes urged against the pun that it is a wit of words only; but if it were such, the objection is pointless, for, in one sense, all wit is more or less a wit of words. It depends on the words in which it is conveyed for its effect. A story which in one man's mouth is as dry and dreary as a price-current, in another's will provoke infinite merriment. What is meant by "murdering a joke," or "missing the point," but that the witticism has been killed or emasculated by its inadequate verbal expression? Again,

Addison contends that verbal allusions are not wit, because "they will not bear translation." He declares that one may say of a pun, as the countryman described his nightingale, that it is *vox, et preterea nihil*, — "a sound, and nothing but a sound." Tried by this test, which is a fallacious one, many a pun is genuine wit. The following *équivoque* will pass Addison's ordeal and lose none of its brilliancy, being as telling in English as in French. "Make a pun," said Louis XIV. to a jesting courtier. "I want a subject." "Make one, then, about myself," suggested his Majesty. "Le roi n'est pas *sujet*" (the king is not a *subject*), was the prompt reply. The wit of two of Horace's Satires turns, as we have seen, chiefly on translatable, though dismal, puns. The objection, when true, that puns cannot be translated, is two-edged, applying, as it does, to all the highest kinds of wit, poetry, and even prose. Howell compares translation to the seamy side of cloth; and if a pun often loses its point by the process, so also evaporate in the transfusion the *naïveté* and sly grace of Chaucer, the delicate bouquet of Keats, the aroma of Milton, the idiomatic charm, the verbal felicity, of the most exquisite lines of Shakspeare.

Once more, it is objected to punning that this kind of wit is evanescent in its character. There is a flash, a sudden contrast, a laugh, and all is over; the heartiness of our laughter being proportioned to the suddenness of our surprise, — and we can be surprised only once. The best joke of this kind, it is added, misses fire on repetition; like champagne, its virtue escapes in the effervescence. Even the gentle "Elia," who stammered out the most piquant puns, as well as the finest observations, in an evening circle, admits that jests of this nature are extremely circum-

scribed in their sphere of action. "A pun," he says, "hath a hearty kind of present ear-kissing smack with it; you can no more transmit it in its pristine flavor than you can send a kiss. . . . This sort of merchandise, above all, requires a quick return. A pun, and its recognitory laugh, must be co-instantaneous. The one is the brisk lightning, the other the fierce thunder. A moment's interval, and the link is snapped."

Admitting that this is generally true, yet it applies in a great measure to all other wit, as well as to that which is a *jeu de mots*. The most brilliant witticisms and sayings of every kind are never so telling in repetition as on their first utterance. What if we can be surprised only once by the same pun, and if its sparkle does escape, like that of champagne, in the effervescence? Is it any objection to a bottle of champagne that we cannot drink it twice? If a pun has tickled our ribs and given our cheeks a holiday, if it has cheated us into momentary forgetfulness of our cares and anxieties, or deprived sorrow of its sting, it has done a good work, and we can afford to wait for further recreation till we hear another.

Dr. Holmes, that "chartered libertine" of wit, says that a punster is like a boy who puts pennies on the railway track, —"he may upset a whole freight-train of conversation in his efforts to flatten a witticism." Our reply is, that the *freight-trains* of conversation, loaded with historical, scholastic, and other lumber of pedantry, cut and dried for the social circle, ought to be upset, and he is a philanthropist who does it. What the "Autocrat" doubtless means is, that puns, like other jests, should be introduced in conversation judiciously and appropriately; that the proper time and place for their utterance should always be considered.

We have already expressed our abhorrence of the professional punster, — the cold-blooded, hardened wretch who sits silently on the watch for hours together until some luckless wight drops a word or phrase susceptible of a double meaning, and then, — pop! darts out like a veteran mouser from her covert, and after worrying and mumbling at it till it is capable of no more twisting and turning, relapses again into silent watchfulness, and lies in wait for another opportunity. Certainly there is no greater pest to society than this, and we care not how summarily it is extinguished. Puns, to be praiseworthy, should be impromptu, and escape from the lips almost involuntarily. They are especially valuable as the airy introduction to more solid wit or to severe sense, — like soup and fish before the main course, or the froth and sparkle of champagne before wines with more body. But propriety is of course the first law of all utterance, — an accordance of speech with place, persons, time, circumstances, and subject. "A march would not be music in a church, nor an anthem music on a parade-ground. A chorus from 'The Messiah' would not be more discordant in a ball-room than a waltz in a cathedral;" and neither of them more dissonant than a pun, on many occasions, in conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

REPARTEE.

The impromptu reply is precisely the touchstone of wit. — MOLIÈRE.

Sunt enim longe venustiora omnia in respondendo quam in provocando. — QUINTILIAN.

IT is a well-known fact that wits and humorists, as a rule, shine to the greatest advantage in conversation. They say finer things than they write. The flashes elicited by the collision of mind with mind during the excitement of oral contest are brighter than those produced with "malice prepense and aforethought" in the quiet and solitude of the study; and hence the most brilliant specimens of wit and humor to be found in any language are those preserved in "Ana" and biographies, rather than those in elaborate works, which, as Horace says, many a day and many a blot have corrected and castigated ten times to perfect accuracy, — "præsectum ad unguem." Such *jeux d'esprit* are more effective than those that drop from the pen, because they are generally unstudied, original, and spring out of the subject and the occasion, when the mind is free from "carking care," and in the most genial mood. Celerity — the celerity which springs from the excitement of conversation — best disperses the valor of the brain, and rallies ideas into shape and service; the clearest is always the flowing stream. We all know how much more brilliantly Johnson could talk than he could write; a born intellectual gladiator, but naturally

sluggish, he needed opposition — the parry and thrust of the social duel — to bring out his latent powers of wit and sarcasm. Lady Mary Montagu tells us that Congreve's talk was still wittier than the dialogue of his plays; and the same was true of Fielding. Selden, the tough parliamentarian, the driest and most ponderous of writers, sparkled with frequent and playful jest in company. Enough of the sayings of other noted wits, from South and Fuller down to Foote, Sydney Smith, and Jerrold, have been recorded to show that their impromptu jests were even more sparkling than those elaborated with much *limæ labor* in their writings. No doubt there are many exceptions to the rule, — men like Pascal, Molière, and Butler, whose wit sparkled only in ink; but such instances are too few to invalidate the general principle. Many of these, too, whose conversation in general society was disappointing, would have been found brilliant beyond expectation in a private *tête-à-tête*, where their shyness would not have sealed their lips. Campbell the poet was too self-conscious, too much frightened by the shadow of his own reputation, to talk well in public; but one who supped with him at his own lodging, and tarried with him till dawn, speaks with ecstatic admiration of the "riotous affluence of wit, humor, fancy, and genius" which the great lyrist poured forth in his wondrous monologue. So, too, would it have proved with poor "Goldy," Addison, and many other dumb wits, had a congenial companion, with a bottle of care-dispelling "Massic," sought in private to unlock the hived honey of their minds.

We have said that spoken wit is more effective than written, because it is generally unstudied. It is a well-known fact that for the highest success of a witticism it is essential that it should seem impromptu. The faculty of saying

brilliant things is so much envied by dull mortals that they love to consider it as the effect of labor rather than a natural gift. No matter how much they are convulsed by a jest, they prefer ascribing it to a marvellous dexterity in leading the conversation up to it after it had been coolly pre-studied and kept in ambush, to regarding it as a flash of fancy, an inspiration of the moment, a sudden and irrepressible outburst of wit. It must be admitted, too, that this suspicion is sometimes well founded, — that spoken wit is not always so spontaneous as it seems. It is well known that Sheridan's finest impromptus were polished by midnight oil; that he was cunning in the concealment of preparation, and complimented for his readiness when he least deserved it. Fastidious to daintiness regarding the material of his wit, he strove for perfection in its expression. When the conversation at a dinner-party chanced to take a turn for which he was not prepared either by thought or reading, he would sit sullen and silent, swallowing glass after glass of wine, — a hindrance rather than a help to the festivity of the company. According to Moore, he would wait patiently a whole evening for the exact moment when the shaft which he had ready feathered might be let fly with effect. There was no effort, either obvious or disguised, to lead to the subject, — no "question detached," to use his own phrase, to draw you into the ambuscade of his ready made joke; and when the lucky, longed-for moment did arrive, the natural and apparently accidental manner in which he would let this treasured sentence fall from his lips greatly added to the astonishment and the charm.

But though not a little spoken wit is premeditated, yet there is one form of it to which the most sceptical persons cannot help granting the merit of spontaneity. When wit

in conversation takes the form of retort or repartee, it is so admirable a weapon, so sudden and unexpected, scatters a man's adversaries with so utter a rout, that the most malicious and spiteful listener cannot restrain his involuntary applause. Of course, *reported* repartee is liable to suspicion; and De Quincey is so sceptical as utterly to deny the truth of a single story of a brilliant repartee. "Universally," he says, "it may be received as a rule, that when an anecdote involves a stinging repartee, a collision of ideas fancifully and brilliantly related to each other by resemblance or contrast, then you may challenge it as false." But, as another English writer says, "a retort of this sort which meets the ear in society, not the eye in a book, is a fact which cannot be gainsaid, an effect which cannot be forgotten; and ready wit does this for its fellows, — it dispels the ungracious incredulity. In the presence of one indubitable flash of fancy we can give credit to recorded triumphs of the same faculty in others."

It is when a repartee is a reply to an attack — and especially if the attack was wholly unexpected — that it extorts the highest praise. Nothing is more admirable, nothing more quickly enlists our sympathies, than this perfect command and quick, instantaneous concentration of the faculties, when a man is taken at a disadvantage, and has to repel an insinuation or an insult without a moment's warning. That felicity of instantaneous analysis which we call "readiness" has saved thousands of men from mortification or contempt. The dexterous leap of thought by which the mind escapes from a seemingly hopeless dilemma is worth more than all the logic and learning in the world. Horace tells us of a reply with which Aristippus baffled the snarling tub-philosopher, Diogenes. "If Aris-

tippus could dine contentedly on herbs," said the Cynic, "he would not feel inclined to court the society of kings." "If he who censures me knew how to live with the great," retorted Aristippus, "he would scorn his vegetables." The rest of his reply we give in the words of Martin's spirited translation: —

> "Buffoon I may be; but with me it pays:
> You play the part to catch the rabble's praise;
> And, fairly weighed, methinks my doings are
> Sounder than yours, — more noble, too, by far.
> I play the courtier: in return the king
> Finds me in horses, food, and everything;
> Whilst you, for all your big words, feel no qualms
> In stooping to the dirt to beg an alms."

Cicero, if we may trust the anecdotes reported of him, was remarkably ready in baffling a sarcastic attack by repartee. Metellus, the son of a lewd woman, said one day to him: "*Dare* you tell your father's name?" "*Can* your mother tell yours?" was the instant reply. When Pompey, who had married Cæsar's daughter, asked Cicero, referring to Dolabella, who had joined Cæsar's party, "Where is your son-in-law?" the orator retorted: "With your father-in-law." An old noble, according to Cicero, happily extinguished an enemy who told him that he was unworthy of his ancestors, by replying: "Hercules! you're worthy of yours."

The poet who created Mercutio and Touchstone and Falstaff must have been pre-eminently quick and happy in repartee. At the Mermaid Tavern, where he associated with Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Ben Jonson, and other intellectual contemporaries, and where, as the first-named tells us, were —

> "Heard words that have been
> So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whom they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest," —

there were frequent "wit combats" between Shakspeare and "rare" old Ben. According to Fuller, who was born eight years before Shakspeare died, the two combatants were like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. "Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakspeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention."

When a man is accused or twitted of any fault or weakness, it is the aim of repartee to show either that it redounds to his credit, or that the ridicule really applies to its author. Those retorts are happiest which turn an adversary's weapons against him, as David killed Goliath with his own sword. It is not generally known that the first Earl of Shaftesbury, the author of the Habeas Corpus Act, the counsellor of Cromwell, and the chancellor of Charles II., — who, Charles declared, knew more law than all his judges, and more divinity than all his bishops, — was the keenest and sharpest wit in an age of wits, and excelled in prompt and cutting retort. Born a cripple, unable to move without his man and his crutch, suffering daily from epileptic fits, he was yet a lively companion, a profound lawyer, and an energetic politician. "Shaftesbury," said Charles one day, "I believe that thou art the wickedest dog in my dominions." "Of a *subject*, sire, I believe I am," was the reply. During his speech in the House of Lords against the Test Bill, overhearing an indolent prelate say, "I wonder when

he will have done preaching," the earl replied in an undertone, but so as to be distinctly audible throughout the house, "When I am made a bishop, my lord." Fuller, in his "Holy and Profane State," relates an admirable retort in illustration of his remark that a great library is not proof of much learning in its owner. "Once a dunce, void of learning, but full of books, flouted a libraryless scholar with these words: 'Salve, Doctor sine libris!' (Good morning, Mr. Doctor without books!) But the next day the scholar, coming into the jeerer's study crowded with books, 'Salvete,' saith he, 'libri sine Doctore!' (Good-day, ye books without a Doctor!)"

John Milton was not a wit. Nothing can be more abortive than his elephantine attempts at humor in his fierce controversies, yet he is reported to have made a crushing retort to a question of Charles II. "Do you not think," said the king, "that your blindness is a judgment upon you for having written in justification of my father's murder?" "Sir," replied the poet, "it is true I have lost my eyesight; but if all calamitous providences are to be considered as divine judgments, your Majesty should remember that your father lost his head." The incident is doubtless a myth. The wit of repartee is strikingly exemplified in the reply of Purcell to Lord Norbury, who, riding in the former's coach, and chancing to pass a gallows, asked, "Where would you be, Purcell, if every man had his due?" "Alone in my carriage," was the instant response. This is as good as Garrick's castigation of Sterne. It is well known that the author of the "Sentimental Journey," who shed tears over a dead ass, treated his wife very unkindly; in spite of which he was foolish enough to maunder one day before Garrick in praise of conjugal love and fidelity. "The

husband," said Sterne, "who behaves unkindly to his wife deserves to have his house burned over his head." "If you think so," quietly remarked Garrick, "I hope your house is insured."

The readiest of all Englishmen at repartee was perhaps Samuel Foote, "the English Aristophanes," as he was inaptly called. Dr. Johnson disliked him; but when at a dinner-party he heard him called a merry-andrew, a buffoon, etc., the sage declared that he had wit, and added this triumphant proof of it: "The first time I was in company with Foote was at Fitzherbert's. Having no good opinion of the fellow, I was resolved not to be pleased; and as it is very difficult to please a man against his will, I went on taking my dinner pretty sullenly, affecting not to mind him. But the dog was so very comical that I was obliged to lay down my knife and fork, throw myself back on my chair, and fairly laugh it out. No, sir, he was irresistible." Again Johnson said: "Foote is the most *incompressible* fellow that I ever knew. When you have driven him into a corner and think you are sure of him, he runs between your legs, or jumps over your head, and makes his escape." No matter with whom Foote contended, or how strong his adversary's position might be, he was sure to provoke a laugh at his expense. It was not merely to quickness of fancy, we are told, to his fund of witty resources, or ready and expert audacity of invention, that his triumphs were owing, but there was a fulness and invincibility of courage in the man which unfailingly warded off humiliation. What can be more exquisitely ludicrous than his boast of his horse: "My horse, sir? Why, I'll wager it to stand still faster than yours can gallop!" On one occasion, when a vain young fellow was trying to win his

admiration by saying fine things, Foote seemed unusually grave. "Why, Foote," said the little man, "you are flat to-day; you don't seem to relish wit." "Hang it, you have not tried me yet," was the cutting reply.

"Why are you forever humming that air?" Foote asked a man who had a poor sense of tune. "Because it haunts me." "No wonder," rejoined the wit; "you are ever murdering it." To a pompous physician at Bath who bored him with his poems, saying that, but for his having so many irons in the fire, he would publish them, Foote said: "Take my advice, doctor, and put your poems where your irons are." Garrick's parsimony was a constant whetstone for Foote's wit. When a person told him of Garrick's censuring Lacey's love of money, and asked why on earth Garrick did n't take the beam out of his own eye before talking of the mote in another man's,—"He is not sure," replied Foote, "of selling the timber." "Where on earth can it be gone?" said Foote, when Garrick dropped a guinea at the Bedford one night, and was searching for it in vain. "To the devil, I think," replied the irritated actor. "Let you alone, David, for making a guinea go farther than any one else," exclaimed Foote. It was said to be impossible to take Foote by surprise, or to disconcert him. As he was telling a story at a dinner-party a gentleman, to try him, pulled him by the coat-tail, and told him that his handkerchief was hanging out. "Thank you," said the ever-ready wit, replacing it; "you know the company better than I do," and went on with his story. A rich contractor was holding forth upon the instability of the world. "Can you account for it, sir?" he asked, turning to Foote. "Well, not very clearly," was the response, "unless we suppose that it was built by contract."

The palm among courtly repartees must be given to Waller's reply when Charles II. asked how it happened that the loyal strains with which he welcomed the Restoration were so very inferior to those in which he had glorified Cromwell and the Protectorate. "Poets, your Majesty, succeed better in fiction than in truth." No wits are more merciless than ladies of fashion when their blood is roused. Emerson, in his essay on "The Comic," relates the following: A lady of high rank, but lean figure, had given the Countess of Dulanloy the nickname of "Le Grenadier tricolore," in allusion to her tall figure, as well as to her republican opinions; the countess retaliated by calling madame "the Venus of Père-la-Chaise," — a compliment to her skeleton which did not fail to circulate.

Though Sheridan, as we have seen, generally premeditated and husbanded his antithetical sprightliness, he could, when hard pressed, throw off retorts and sarcasms on the spur of the moment, — as, for example, when in the House of Commons he called Whitbread's image of the phœnix "a poulterer's description of a phœnix;" and, again, in his reply to Pitt, who taunted him with his genius for the stage: "Flattered and encouraged by the right honorable gentleman's panegyric on my talents, if I ever again engage in the compositions he alludes to, I may be tempted to an act of presumption, — to attempt an improvement on one of Ben Jonson's best characters, that of *The Angry Boy* in the 'Alchemist.'" There was readiness, too, as well as wit, in the reply which he hiccoughed to the watchman who found him "half-seas-over" in Covent Garden, and demanded his name, — "W-w-wilberforce!" When it was reported to him that the fretful critic, Cumberland, had said of a performance of "The School for Scandal" that

he was surprised that the audience laughed at it so immoderately, as it did not make him smile, — "Cumberland is truly ungrateful," said Sheridan, "for not smiling at my comedy; for I saw a tragedy of his a fortnight before at Covent Garden, and laughed from the beginning to the end." In another reply of Sheridan to Pitt we have an example of a peculiarly effective retort, — that is, where an expression used by a speaker in an attack upon another is caught up by the latter and pushed to an unexpected result. Pitt, who was at the head of the ministry, compared Sheridan's constant opposition to an eternal drag-chain, clogging all the wheels, retarding the career, and embarrassing the movements of the Government. Sheridan replied that a real drag-chain differed from the imaginary one of the premier in one essential particular, — it was applied only when the machine was *going down the hill.*

Coleridge, when a young man, is said to have been quick at repartee, and in repelling an attack to have been preeminently happy. On one occasion, when he was riding to a race-course on horseback, both horse and rider were exceedingly provocative of vulgar criticism, — the former being a small, bony, angular, spiritless creature, with a dirty bridle and rusty stirrups; the latter being dressed in a black coat, with black breeches, black silk stockings, and shoes. As the two jogged along they met a wag in a sporting costume, who asked Coleridge, with a knowing twinkle, if he had met a tailor on the road just like himself. "Yes," was the reply, "and he told me that he had dropped his goose. I guess, by the arch fellow's looks, that he must have meant you." "Caught a tartar," muttered the sportsman, and smartly rode off. Reaching the race-course, Coleridge drew up by a barouche and four, containing a

baronet (a sporting member of Parliament, known to have been bribed by the ministry), several smart ladies, and sundry gorgeous flunkeys. "A pretty piece of blood, sir, you have there," said the baronet, with a curl of the upper lip. "Will you sell him?" "Yes." "Name your price, sir, rider and all." "My price," said Coleridge, as the ladies began to titter, "is a hundred guineas; as for the rider, as he has never been in Parliament, *his* price is not yet fixed." Charles Lamb, though not an expert in repartee, occasionally stammered out a happy reply to one who bored him. "You don't seem at all the better for what I am telling you," said a woman, who, being his neighbor at dinner, wearied him by ceaseless chatter. "No, ma'am; but this gentleman on the other side of me must, for it all came in at one ear and went out at the other." In the "Personal Reminiscences of Sir Frederick Pollock," recently published, a caustic reply of Mrs. Grote is recorded. In 1849 she went to see Louis Napoleon in Paris. Remembering some former misunderstanding between them, he chose to be very cool and distant in his reception of her, and only asked, "Do you stay long in Paris?" when she had her revenge by retorting, "No; do *you?*"

The genius of the French for repartee is well known. Bassompière, French ambassador to Spain, was one day telling Henry IV. how he entered Madrid. "I was mounted on the very smallest mule in the world," said the ambassador. "Ah," exclaimed the king, "what an amusing sight, to see the biggest ass mounted on the smallest mule!" "I was your Majesty's representative," was the quiet but caustic rejoinder. The Chancellor D'Aguesseau, with all his intellect and learning, was very irresolute; his son, who was very rapid in his decisions, said to him one

day: "Father, you know everything, and never decide upon anything." "My son," retorted the Chancellor, "you know nothing, and decide always upon everything." What can be happier than Talleyrand's apology for having passed a lady in the street without having looked at her: "If I had looked, I could not have passed you." What, again, could be terser or more epigrammatic than his query, when Rulhière objected to the charge of ill-nature, saying that in all his life he had done but one ill-natured action, — "Et quand finira-t-elle [and when will it end]?" When M. de Fontanes, extolling Chateaubriand's "Martyrs," which met with a rapid sale on its first publication, finished an account of the narrative by saying that Eudore and Cymodocée were thrown into the circus and devoured "by the beasts," — "Like the work," added Talleyrand. How keenly he punctured the vanity of the egotistic and boastful Mirabeau! At an important political crisis the latter, who was deeply marked by small-pox, was descanting on the qualities which a minister required to extricate the nation from its difficulties; namely, great knowledge, genius, familiarity with the upper classes, popularity with the lower, the gift of writing and speaking eloquently, — all of which qualities it was obvious enough Mirabeau deemed his own. Everybody stared with admiration except Talleyrand, who simply listened attentively to the end, and then remarked: "It seems to me that you have omitted one of the qualities of this remarkable man: should he not be very much pitted with the small-pox?"

How often did Voltaire's readiness at repartee save him from social disaster! When an advocate presented himself to him with the bombastic compliment, "I salute you, light of the world!" Voltaire replied: "Madame Denis,

bring the snuffers!" Fontenelle once said to him: "Tragedy is not your true field; your style is too strong and too brilliant." "I will immediately re-peruse your pastorals," was the reply. A Dutch assailant of Voltaire drew upon himself the memorable retort: "I wish you more wit and fewer consonants."

Physicians as a class have not been remarkable for wit. The jokes of which they have been the butts are legion; yet their retaliatory repartees have been rare, or rarely reported. Their few retorts have been upon their patients; and when striking, have generally been rough and blunt. The so-called wit of Abernethy, so much praised for its pith and terseness, was little more than a mixture of bluntness, boorishness, and plain truth. It must be admitted, however, that in the whimsical complaints and foolish inquiries of sham patients, — nervous, fashionable persons, with imaginary diseases, — the medical gentlemen have abundant provocation for their occasional tartness. The famous Dr. Radcliffe, — the same Radcliffe upon whom Prior wrote the smart epigram I have quoted, — if he was not a wit himself, could keenly appreciate another man's repartee. He is said to have had one very questionable habit, — he never paid a debt if he could help it. In his day every Londoner had to pave the street in front of his own house, or it remained unpaved. A certain pavior who had been employed by the doctor, after long and fruitless attempts to get paid, caught him just getting out of his carriage at his own door in Bloomsbury Square, and set upon him. "Why, you rascal," said Radcliffe, "do you pretend to be paid for such a piece of work? Why, you have spoiled my pavement, and then covered it over with earth to hide your bad work!" "Doctor," quoth the pavior, "mine is not the

only bad work that the earth hides." "You dog, you!" said the doctor, "are you a wit? You must then be poor; so come in;" and he paid him.

As the incessant contests of the forum tend to sharpen and keep bright the wits of the combatants, it is not surprising that the disciples of Coke and Blackstone are usually quick at repartee. When the witty Scotch advocate, Henry Erskine, was pleading a case before the House of Lords, and spoke of certain curators, he pronounced the word in the Scotch fashion, accenting the first syllable, — cŭrators. This offended the ear of one of the English judges, and he interrupted the speaker with: "We are in the habit of saying curātor in this country, Mr. Erskine, following the analogy of the Latin, in which, as you are aware, the penult is long." "I thank your Lordship sincerely," replied the canny Scotchman; "we are weak enough in Scotland to think that in pronouncing the word cŭrator we follow the analogy of the English language. But I need scarcely say that I bow with pleasure to the opinion of so learned a senātor and so great an orātor as your lordship." There is an equally good story of a repartee by John Clerk, an eminent Scotch lawyer, who, in pleading before the same dignified body in the case of a dispute about a mill-stream, pronounced the word "water" as if written *watter*. "Mr. Clerk," said the Chancellor, "do you spell 'water' in Scotland with two *t*'s?" Clerk, a little nettled at this hit at his national tongue, answered: "Na, my lord, we dinna spell 'watter' [making the word as short as he could] wi' twa *t*'s, but we spell 'mainners' [making the word as long as he could] wi' twa *n*'s."

Similar to Henry Erskine's triumph was that of an English barrister in a retort upon Lord Campbell. In an action

to recover for damage done to a brougham, a learned counsel repeatedly called the vehicle a "brough-am," making two syllables of the word. Lord Campbell thereupon, with considerable pomposity, observed: "*Broom* is the more usual pronunciation. That pronunciation is open to no grave objection, and it has the great advantage of saving the time consumed by uttering an extra syllable." Half an hour later in the same trial Lord Campbell said, in reference to a decision given in a similar case: "In that case the carriage which had sustained injury was an *omnibus*." "Pardon me, my lord," interposed the queen's counsel with such promptness that his Lordship was startled into silence, "a carriage of the kind to which you draw attention is usually termed a ''buss;' that pronunciation is open to no grave objection, and it has the great advantage of saving the time consumed by uttering two extra syllables." A roar of laughter followed, in which his Lordship joined more heartily than even the barristers.

A barrister once praised Kean extravagantly to his face; whereupon the actor, enjoying the flattery, began talking about the circuit on which the "hired master of tongue-fence" went. "Pray," asked Kean, "were you ever at the theatre in Exeter?" "Yes, sir," said the barrister, "and saw there an ugly little croaking wretch of an actor taking the very part in which you so greatly excel." "That actor, sir," said Kean, "was your humble servant." "Is it possible," exclaimed the barrister with admirable presence of mind, "that you could have improved so much in every particular in so short a time?"

Keen, sarcastic words, and even mere incivilities, indulged in by judges at the expense of counsel, have sometimes met with sharp retribution. It has been observed

that a junior must have been singularly devoid of sensitiveness who rose to address the stern Tenterden without fear and trembling. If his Lordship's stomach chanced to be out of order, as it generally was after a city dinner, from his extreme fondness for turtle, woe to the counsel who cited an inapplicable case. There was an applauding titter round the back benches when, on his Lordship's harshly chiding a reference to Justinian's Institutes, a young barrister retorted: "Oh, my lord, I am quite aware that we have nothing to do with the *civil* law in this court." Lord Clare, who had a life-long feud with Curran, beginning with a duel, once brought a Newfoundland dog into court, and gave it his exclusive attention, while Curran was speaking for his client. The counsel suddenly paused. "Proceed, Mr. Curran, pray, proceed," said the Lord Chancellor, looking up, with his hand on the head of his canine companion. "I will proceed, my lord, when your Lordships have concluded your consultation." When a judge said to the same advocate, "Do you see anything ridiculous in this wig?" "Nothing but the head," was the reply. Curran was once addressing a jury, when the judge, who was thought to be antagonistic to his client, intimated his dissent from the arguments advanced by shaking his head. "I see, gentlemen," said Curran, "the motion of his Lordship's head. Persons unacquainted with him would be apt to think that this implied a difference of opinion; but be assured, gentlemen, this is not the case. When you know his Lordship as well as I do, it will be unnecessary to tell you that when he shakes his head there is really *nothing in it.*"

The eminent New England lawyer, Theophilus Parsons, had an inexhaustible wit, and his repartees were surprisingly ready, apt, and, if he chose, severe. He was once

arguing a case before a judge who was somewhat deaf. As the advocate did not adapt the pitch of his voice to the judge's infirmity, the latter cried out: "Mr. Parsons, I tell you once for all, *take that glove off your tongue.*" "Certainly, sir," thundered the advocate; "and may I beg your Honor *to take the wool out of your ears?*" It is not often that a lawyer attempts the sublime in a court-room speech, since the danger of taking the step beyond is so great, and a failure is far more ignominious there, where such "gush" is out of place, than on a Fourth-of-July platform, where a little "spread-eagleism" is pardoned, if not expected. This hazardous attempt was made, nevertheless, some years ago, not on our Western frontiers, but in the American Athens, and by an accomplished and scholarly advocate, George S. Hillard, then United States District Attorney. In opening an important case in the United States court, he introduced a grand and impressive but sulphurous description of hell from the Inferno of Dante. In the height, torrent, and whirlwind of his eloquence, when all his hearers were listening with breathless attention, the opposing counsel, Henry W. Paine, quietly arose, and, with infinite courtesy, remarked: "May it please your Honor, I fear that my brother Hillard has mistaken your Honor's jurisdiction." The laugh which followed from Bench, Bar, and spectators quenched the oratorical "gush" like the descent of a sudden shower upon Fourth-of-July fireworks, and extinguished in the speaker all ambition again to attempt the sublime, especially in the neighborhood of a witty antagonist. On another occasion Mr. Paine was making a legal argument before an eminent United States judge, when the latter, interrupting him, said: "Mr. Paine, you know that that is not law." "I know it, your Honor,"

retorted the advocate, with a deferential bow; "but it *was* law till your Honor just spoke." The judge, who was not over-popular with the Bar, must have felt, after this blow to his dignity, as did Bret Harte's "Mr. Abner Dean,"—

"When
A chunk of old red sandstone took him in the abdomen;
And he smiled a kind of sickly smile, and curled up on the floor,
And the subsequent proceedings interested him no more."

A few wit-combats between the disciples of Blackstone and those of Æsculapius have been reported, in which the former have evidently had the advantage. Sir Henry Holland, the celebrated London physician, was once engaged in a hot argument with Bobus Smith, an ex-Advocate-General, touching the merits of their respective professions. "You will admit," said Holland, "that *your* profession does not make angels of men." "No," retorted Bobus, "there you have the best of it. Yours certainly gives them the best chance." Equally keen was the reply of a learned counsel to an M. D. who ridiculed what Bentham would have called the "uncognoscibility" of the technical terms of the law. "I never could comprehend what you lawyers mean by *docking an entail.*" "My dear doctor," replied the barrister, "I don't wonder at that; it is doing what your profession never consents to,—*suffering a recovery.*" When law and theology clash, then comes the tug of war. "Why is it," said an eminent lawyer in a New England city to an equally eminent clergyman of the same city, "that you ministers, who are professedly the 'lights of the world,' are always quarrelling with one another, while we lawyers, wicked as we are represented, treat each other with courtesy, and rarely disagree?" "Is it possible," replied the divine, "that so fine a scholar as yourself can

be under the necessity of asking that question? Has not Milton answered your question two centuries in advance?

> " 'Devil with devil damned
> Firm concord hold; *men* only disagree.' "

Per contra: When the noted "revival" preacher, Burchard, was delivering one of his most fiery sermons in the old Chatham Street Chapel, New York, Colonel Aaron Burr entered the house, upon which he is said to have exclaimed: "There is the gray-headed sinner; I shall appear in judgment against him." Walking down the aisle with the bold, firm, military step so peculiarly his own, until he had reached the centre of the house, Burr, with a low bow, addressed his assailant thus: "Mr. Preacher, I have been a lawyer in this city for nearly half a century; and of all the rascals it has been my lot to deal with, none surpass that class of criminals who turn State's evidence!"

One of the most telling forms of repartee consists in a seeming acquiescence in the views of a speaker, and then turning the argument against him on his own premises. It was a practical repartee when a collegian, having asked a brother collegian to lend him a book, and having been told that it could not be lent out, but might be read in the owner's rooms, made a similar reply when his friend, who was so chary of his volumes, asked him for the loan of his *bellows*. Some years ago a Boston gentleman borrowed of a moneyed acquaintance a hundred dollars, promising to repay the loan in a week, — which he did. Some months afterward the borrower requested of the same gentleman a second loan of the same amount for the same length of time, reminding him at the same time of his former punctuality in keeping his promise. "No!" was the prompt

and unexpected reply; "I lent you a hundred dollars once, and you repaid it on the very day you agreed. I never suffer a man *to disappoint me a second time.*"

Not many smart repartees of "colored men" are reported by the Press; but occasionally their replies have a *naïveté* and drollery which are as effective as wit or humor. President Lincoln once fell into conversation with a negro on board a steamboat, and finding he had served in a regiment that suffered severely at the battle of Fort Donelson, asked if he was in that fight. The "darkey" owned he had had a little taste of it; and then the following colloquy ensued: "Stood your ground, did you?" "No, sa, I runs!" "Run at the first fire?" "Yes, sa, and would ha' run sonna had I knowed it comin'." "If our soldiers were all like you, traitors might have broken up the Government without resistance." "Yes, sa; dar would hab been no help for it. I would n't put my life in de scale 'gainst any Gobernment dat ever existed, for no Gobernment could make up de loss." "Do you think your company would have missed you if you had been killed?" "Maybe not, sa; a dead white man ain't much to dese sogers, let alone a dead nigga; but *I'd ha' missed myself, and dat was de pint wid me!*"

It is not in repelling sudden and unexpected personal attacks merely, that this weapon of wit is displayed to the best advantage. Patriotism has prompted some of its finest achievements. When a Vienna lady said to Lord Dudley: "What wretchedly bad French you all speak in London!" he promptly retorted: "It is true, madam, we have not enjoyed the advantage of having the French twice in our capital." When Gibbon and Franklin were together in Paris, the ambassador sought an interview with that

author. The historian of Rome's Decline and Fall replied that he had the highest respect for Franklin's genius and abilities, but could have no communication with a revolted subject. Franklin retorted that whenever the historian wished to begin a new history, "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire," he would gladly afford him the materials. Some years ago the late Count Gurowski and the late General Greene, of Rhode Island, — "the Chesterfield of the Senate," as he was called, on account of his courteous manners when he was a member of that body, — were at Newport, sitting on the piazza of a hotel in midsummer, when a common acquaintance was smitten with a desire to introduce them to each other. Without a hint to that effect to either gentleman, and with that too-ready facility of introduction which Americans often manifest, he said suddenly: "Count Gurowski, allow me to introduce you to General Greene, — General Greene, Count Gurowski." The count, who had then not been long in the country, bore the introduction with his well-known stoicism of manner, and, without making, by word or gesture, any acknowledgment, peered over his green spectacles at the general, and said very quietly: "I believe you have a great many generals in this country." "Yes," replied Greene, bowing; "almost as many as you have counts in Europe."

CHAPTER IX.

CLERICAL WIT.

Piety enjoins no man to be dull. — ROBERT SOUTH.

Would it not be something like a mockery, when we deem it our duty to wage battle, were we to shrink from using the weapons which God has placed in our hands? — ARCHDEACON HARE.

IS wit a desirable or a dangerous faculty in a divine? Does, or does not, its possession tend to incapacitate a preacher for the great duties of his calling? There are persons who think that that calling exacts from him, to a certain extent, a solemnity of feeling and demeanor, a conventional propriety and decorum, which are not demanded in other professions, and which are inconsistent with the perpetration of jokes. If a preacher is endowed with a large measure of wit or humor, every subject will come at last to be viewed by him through a comic medium; his love of jest will betray itself on improper occasions; and in the exigencies of religious controversy, should he ever engage in one, the temptation to raise a laugh at an opponent's expense will be irresistible. Forgetting that wit is not argument, — that it is as easy to burlesque what is hallowed as what is absurd, — he will unconsciously make sport of truth when fancying that he is only ridiculing its caricature; and, instead of weaning the misguided from their errors, he will only strengthen them in their convictions, when they

find them assailed by the exaggeration in which humor is too apt to indulge, and to shock them by the mockery which they will regard as misplaced and profane.

To all this it may be replied that every faculty which God has given to man, even the logical, may be abused; that when God calls a man to the ministry, he calls the *whole* man to his service; that wit is a precious gift, especially when combined with wisdom and restrained by principle, and that its possession not only legitimizes, but makes a *duty* of its proper exercise. The faculties which Nature has implanted in a man, and which constitute his individuality, differencing him from his fellows, will assert themselves, and it is useless to try to thwart or extinguish them.

"Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret."

If a man is bursting with wit or bubbling over with humor, God has a work for him; and if he present the truth in a sharp, pungent form, it will tell as nothing else will. His keen thrusts and tingling ironies will rouse the slumbering, startle the stolid, shame the profligate, and set the thoughtless to thinking. While it is true that ridicule is not the test of truth, it is equally certain that it is only by ridicule that many dull-witted and sin-steeped persons can be made to see and feel the truth. Ruskin has said truly that folly and sin are to some extent synonymous; and it would be well for mankind in general if all could be made to feel that wickedness is as contemptible as it is hateful. There is a stupidity in sin, a thick, rhinoceros skin of insensibility, which only the feather-winged arrows of wit can pierce. Iniquity has a pachydermatous hide, and can feel only when coals of fiery ridicule are laid upon its back, and blown by the breath of laughter. This office is per-

formed by the wit-endowed preacher. He will cleave with his Damascus blade the joints and marrow of many a giant error; and with the warm, glowing sunshine of his humor dispel the gloom of doubt and despondency that overhangs many a timid soul.

Even those who object most strongly to clerical wit do not mean, we suppose, to assert that the clergyman should never relax the muscles of his face, or "show his teeth i' the way of smile," though Nestor himself should affirm the jest be laughable. Nor can they mean to assert that he may not, on proper occasions, — in private, at least, — move the midriff of a friend by an innocent jest. Certainly they are not the most winning or influential of preachers who wear always the externals of piety, who put on an owl-like gravity with their stiff white cravat, and who are more solicitous about their professional decorum than for the happiness of those with whom they mingle. Humanity is repelled by such formalism. It keeps at a distance from it, and greets the clergyman's conventional dress and manner with a conventional reception. It does not object to gravity in itself, at proper times and places. If, then, the clergyman may be permitted *sometimes* to jest, who shall decide how often he may be permitted to do it? Who shall name the limit where wit passes the boundary line of decorum, and begins to be anti-clerical? If one jest is permissible, why not two, ten, or twenty? Or shall his jesting be timed by the clock; and if so, "at what precise moment must the wrinkled grin be smoothed down into the platitude of propriety? Is the sin in the strength of the article? Is a smile orthodox, and a laugh heretical? May a good man, without violation of his goodness, cause his companion to shake in his chair with gentle titillations, while it becomes

sinful to inflict the acuter displays of wit, the inextinguishable laughter of the immortals?"

But it may be said that the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, after admonishing them concerning uncleanness or covetousness, "Let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints," adds, "neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor *jesting*," etc. We reply that the Greek word here translated "jesting" is *εὐτραπελία*, which means, not jesting of every kind, but *low*, *scurrilous wit* (see Thayer's "Lexicon of the Greek Testament"), from which not only clergymen, but everybody else, should abstain. The same apostle has taught us that nothing is "unclean in itself, but only in its abuse." He has also enjoined that the speech of Christians should be "full of grace, seasoned with *salt;*" and what is true wit but the salt of social life?

It is urged, again, that our Saviour was never known to indulge in wit or laughter, and therefore such levities must be unbecoming in his ambassadors. It is true that the writers of the Gospels record no instance of the Master's laughing; but is it certain, therefore, that he never did so? Admitting that such was the fact, does it follow that his followers should never jest or smile? Is it the letter of his example, or the spirit, which it is our duty to reproduce in our lives? Are there not scores of things which it is proper for us in our earthly, human relations to do, which Jesus did not sanction by his express example? Must the Christian never marry, never serve his country as a soldier, never engage in trade, never practise law or medicine, or become a statesman or legislator, because his Master has set him no example of these things? Well has Jeremy Taylor said on this point: "We never read that Jesus

laughed, and but once that he rejoiced in spirit; but the declension of our natures cannot bear the weight of a perpetual grave deportment without the intervals of refreshment or free alacrity." If our Saviour himself never laughed, it is difficult to believe that the bystanders did not laugh, or at least smile, when he tore the mask from the hypocritical Pharisees, who laid heavy burdens on men's shoulders which they themselves would not move with their finger, and devoured widows' houses, even while for a pretence they made long prayers.

Be all this as it may, — be wit a blessing or a bane to a clergyman, — it is certainly a remarkable fact that no class in society, no profession or calling, can boast of a larger number of eminent wits and humorists than the clerical. Five of the greatest humorists that ever made the world ring with laughter were priests, — Rabelais, Scarron, Swift, Sterne, and Sydney Smith. So also were Erasmus, Mapes, and Bishop Still. Nor is this surprising. The seeming anomaly is accounted for when we consider that just in proportion to the gravity of the pursuits in which men engage, to the weight of their responsibilities, do they need to unbend themselves, to indulge in mirth and hilarity, in order to relieve and recreate their wearied energies, and to regain that elasticity and buoyancy of soul which is equally essential to usefulness and to happiness.

The founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther, was largely endowed with wit and humor, and did not fail to use them, both to the delight of his friends and the discomfiture of his enemies. It was his firm conviction that "the Evil One may be driven away by jeering, because he is a haughty spirit, and cannot bear contempt." So, when in his fits of deep physical and spiritual depression he

fancied that the Devil said to him: "Thou art a great sinner," he replied: "Canst thou not tell me something new, Satan?" He believed that the earth was the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and never thought to honor God by wearing a long face. Therefore he cracked jokes with Lord Cate, as he playfully called his wife; talked to his cat, for whom he bought oysters, lest the servants should take a dislike to it from having continually to supply its wants; patted the head of his dog, which he fondled for sixteen years; laughed, body and soul, at the caricatures of the Pope which hung upon his study-wall; played at skittles with Melanchthon and other friends; drove away the Devil and low spirits with the sweet strains of his flute; shook the midriffs of his friends with laughter as they sat with him at the supper-table or walked in his garden; and when "a poor ignorant creature" came from the Low Countries to dispute with him about various things, received him kindly and said, "Had n't we better dispute over a can of beer?" The writings of Luther contain not only much "lion's marrow," — stern truth conveyed in plain, homely language, — but much fierce, vehement invective, and are characterized by that noble scorn with which a brave, honest, outspoken man blows away, as through snorting nostrils, those sophistries, quibbles, and meannesses in controversy which defy logical exposure and can be reached only by contempt.

Among the humorists in holy orders few have had a keener sense of the ludicrous, or exerted more influence, than Erasmus. Though living in fellowship with Rome, he lashed the vices of the clergy and mocked the superstitions of the monks with a never-failing activity. The influence of his "Praise of Folly," in which Folly harangues the reader

to prove his superiority to Wisdom, and which he wrote on a journey from Italy to England, was immense. Twenty thousand copies of the book were sold in a few months, — an enormous sale for that age. A writer in the London "Eclectic Review" pronounces it unrivalled in any language for its acute judgment, its polished taste, and its pungent and sparkling wit. The best proof of its power is the saying which was current early regarding the Reformation: "Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched the chickens." Nothing can be happier than some of the impromptu sallies of wit which were constantly escaping from the Dutch scholar's lips. When the Elector of Saxony asked him what he thought of the great Protestant Reformer, "Luther," said Erasmus, "has committed two great faults, — he has touched the Pope's crown, and the monks' bellies." When the mob were destroying the images, he observed that now was the time for the priests to work miracles; they had done plenty when there was no particular occasion. When Luther boldly married Catherine, the papists cried out that now Antichrist might be expected; for there had long been a tradition that he would be the offspring of a monk and a nun. "If that be so," quietly observed Erasmus, "he must have appeared already a good many times." In his famous "Colloquies" he dealt some heavy blows at the Papal Church; but as he did not join the Reformers, though he lashed the monks and priests, he pleased neither party, and was distrusted by one and denounced by the other. He was, in fact, the best-abused man of his day, and the most wretched puns were made upon his name. He was styled "*Errasmus*, ab errando;" "*Arasmus*, ab arando;" "*Erasimus*, ab asino;" and was made the subject of a dreary epitaph: —

"Hic jacet *Eras-mus*, qui quondam bonus erat mus;
Rodere qui solitus, roditur a vermibus."

But he bore all this banter without a murmur, and had the jests been really witty, instead of being so inane, he would have really relished them, though perpetrated at his own expense. "Tantam vim habet lepos," he somewhere says, "et jucunditas sermonis, ut etiam in nos apte tortis dicteriis dilectemur." Fuller tells us that Erasmus "was a badger in his jeers; where he did bite, he would make his teeth meet." In the darkest hours his mirthfulness was unquenchable; and even when suffering under the agonies of that disease by which he was so long tortured, he still had his joke at "Rex calculus," or "Rhetor calculus," and kept up his buoyancy of heart to the end.

Another monkish humorist who convulsed his contemporaries with laughter, was Rabelais. Probably no writer of equal ability has been more completely misunderstood. Owing to the buffoonery and mysticism in which his satire is disguised, as well as the obscenity which disfigures his pages, he has been regarded by many as a merry-andrew without any serious purpose, — as one who mumbled a Mass, and bawled a drinking-song; who spent the briefest time possible over vespers, and the longest possible over prayers; who mocked at all things which men are wont to reverence, human or divine. His wit and humor, his apologues and allegories, his satires and pasquinades, quibbles, clenches, and puns, float in such an ocean of filth that they have been called "the literature of nastiness." Yet Rabelais was a botanist, a physician, and an astronomer; he knew Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, Latin, and Italian; and had gathered together from the most various sources a mass of learning like the diet of his own Pantagruel, who

had four thousand six hundred cows milked every morning for his breakfast. The monk traversed, says Sir James Stephen, "the boundless expanse of human knowledge under the guidance of his own sagacity, wit, and humor, — a wit vaulting at a bound from the arctic to the antarctic poles of thought; a sagacity embracing all the higher questions of man's social existence, and many of the deeper problems of his moral constitution; and a humor which fairly baffles all attempts to analyze or describe it: for it was the result, not of natural temperament alone, but also of the most assiduous and severe studies."

The two chief objects of Rabelais' satire are priests and monks; but he mocks also at the follies of the whole Church, at the court and constitution of Rome, and at the folly of the people who forget God in their reverence for the pope. The condition of society in his day is a perpetual theme for his ridicule and scorn. That stabbers and bandits should call themselves and be reverenced as kings and princes; that ignorant priests, mountebanks, and magicians should delude and cheat mankind, commanding men's homage for their tricks, superstitions, and quackeries; that the harlots of princes should waste the property of a nation, and dissolute friars spawn their uncleanness and impurity upon the people, — all this was to Rabelais infinitely ludicrous, and he burst into a roar of laughter: a laughter, however, which not seldom masks a feeling of sadness and compassion. In his "Gargantua" he embodied all the characteristics and tendencies of his time. The world was then in a transition state. The spirit of inquiry had arisen; men had a burning thirst for knowledge; but all the elements of civilization were struggling together in a chaotic state. Gargantua symbolizes the intense crav-

ing for knowledge which pervaded society. The giant has an insatiable maw, which engulfs tons of food. He devours books as well as loaves by wholesale, is crammed with all the learning of the time, and becomes as superficially omniscient as any scholar in the Sorbonne. He rides a great mare to Paris, who, by the whisking of her tail, knocks down whole forests; he robs Notre Dame of its bells; he combs the cannon-balls out of his hair after a battle; he eats up six pilgrims in a salad, who live for some time in the valleys and recesses of his mouth, — with other equally laughable absurdities and extravagances.

In contemplating such a humorist, one is alike surprised that such wisdom as his writings reveal should assume the mask of folly, and that such folly should permit the growth and development of any true wisdom. Through all his life, Rabelais was intoxicated with gayety, mad with animal spirits, — drowned, so to speak, in a flood of mirth. Even on his death-bed the *vis comica* of his nature was triumphant, in spite of his sufferings; and when, a physician himself, he saw his doctors consulting together, he raised his head from the pillow and said with a smile: "Dear gentlemen, let me die a natural death." As his friends wept around him, he turned a merry face upon them, and said: "Ah! you rogues, if I were to die ten times over, I should never make you cry half as much as I have made you laugh!"

Mr. Besant, in his able work on "The French Humorists," expresses the opinion that though Rabelais was a great moral teacher, yet it would have been better for France if his book, tied to a millstone, had been hurled into the sea. Not on account of the filth and dirt, — "they do not *take hold* of the mind; a little cold water washes all off. . . .

He destroyed effectually, perhaps for centuries yet to come, *the earnestness in France.* He found men craving for a better faith, believing that it was to be found; and left them doubting whether any system in the world could give it. Great and noble as are many of the passages in Rabelais, profoundly wise as he was, I do believe that no writer who ever lived has inflicted such lasting injury on his country."

One of the earliest clerical wits in England whose writings have come down to us was that "luminary and honor of British literature," as Erasmus styles him, John Skelton, poet-laureate in the reign of Henry VIII. He was first curate of Trumpington, near Cambridge, and later rector of Diss, in Norfolk. Deeply imbued with classic lore, a courtier, enjoying rare opportunities for studying men of all ranks, he became a daring and reckless satirist, and lashed the vices of his age with stinging severity. He did not hesitate to attack even Wolsey in the plenitude of his power, and to ridicule his "base progeny" and "greasy genealogy." He taunted the nobles with their base subserviency to the pampered and over-gorged favorite of the king, and declared that —

> "They dare not look out of a dure,
> For dread of the mastiff cur;
> For dread of the butcher's dog
> Would worry them like a hog!"

Skelton's satirical invectives are hurled in short, rattling, helter-skelter lines, rhyming in couplets, triplets, and quartets, with a rattle like that of a rattlesnake in them; and though not poetry of a high order, are yet full of freshness, pungency, and originality. As an acute critic has said, there is the crackle of Northern pine-logs in the fire

he roasts people at, — a kind of humor more old Roman than Attic, as English native humor certainly is. Unlike Chaucer, who in his ridicule of monks had sought mainly to give an artistic representation of a class, and to provoke merriment at their expense, Skelton has a practical purpose in view, — which is to rouse popular indignation against those whom he assails. His principal poem is "Colyn Clout," in which he ridicules the clergy with merciless satire, and attacks the iniquities of the time with a free hand. In his attack on Wolsey "the words spring from him like so many monkeys, pointing, grinning, chattering, howling, biting." The similes have the pitiless pungency which, a century and a half later, characterized the verse of Butler. Of course the "greasy" cardinal could not be defied with impunity, and Skelton had to fly from his vengeance to the Sanctuary at Westminster. We are sorry to say that stories are told of the satirist which suggest that his life was probably as wild as his rhymes, and that he was one of those clergymen who —

> "Thump the pulpit when they should tread the stage."

A clerical wit and humorist of a different stamp, though not unlike Skelton in his love of practical jokes, was Richard Corbet, author of a humorous "Journey to France," and other poems, and one of the chaplains of James I. His inexhaustible flow of animal spirits, prompt, convivial wit, and skill in verse-making made him eminently popular, and preferments rained upon him. He was bishop, first of Oxford, and afterward of Norwich. The moral laxity of the times may be judged from his unclerical freaks, one of which was exchanging dresses with a mendicant vocalist, and singing ballads in the street; another, shutting himself up in

his wine-cellar with his chaplain, Dr. Lushington, where, throwing off first his gown, with the exclamation, "There goes the doctor!" and then his episcopal hood, with "There goes the bishop!" he would spend the night in "potations deep and strong." Riding out one day with Dr. Stubbins, a very fat man, the coach was overturned, and both its occupants thrown into a ditch. When describing the mishap afterward, the merry bishop used to say that Dr. Stubbins was up to the elbows in mud, and he was up to the elbows in Dr. Stubbins. At confirmation, one day, having to lay his hand on the head of a very bald man, he said to his chaplain: "Some dust, Lushington, to keep my hand from slipping!"

The next century was distinguished by three clerical wits, — Doctors Joseph Hall, Robert South, and Thomas Fuller, whose writings are as racy and readable to-day as when first given to the world. Hall's Satires have considerable vigor, but have been overshadowed by his prose. They were published under the title of "Toothless Satires," which Milton declared was a bull, — "as if he had said *toothless teeth.*" South, who was successively prebendary of St. Peter's, Westminster, canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and chaplain to Charles II., was one of the most brawny, fiery, and witty divines that ever stood in an English pulpit. Beginning life as an admirer of Cromwell, he became an ardent partisan of the Restoration, — the very bulldog of the civil and ecclesiastical establishment. He was not a pulpit buffoon, but a wit; coarse and truculent sometimes, but trenchant and incisive, putting his whole force into every sabre-stroke, and satisfied with nothing but cleaving his antagonist from crown to chin. His sermons abound in shrewd sense, vehement denunciation, teasing mockeries,

galling irony, and biting sarcasms, which would make an anchorite smile, and relax even the face of a Trappist. It was the Puritans, with what he calls their "heavenly hummings and hawings" and their "blessed breathings," who were the most frequent targets of his ridicule. For the preachers of the tub and the barn, with their "whimsical cant of *issues*, *tendencies*, *indwellings*, *rollings*, and *recumbencies*;" who denied the divine right of kings, and declared that "a man should be able to *make* a pulpit before he preached in it," — South cherished the supremest scorn. Gifted with a razor-like wit and an exquisite sense of the grotesque and the ridiculous, he satirized with the keenest gust their meagre, mortified faces, their droning and shuffling whine, their sanctimonious look and demeanor, and declared that Popery and Puritanism "were as truly brothers as Romulus and Remus, — they sucked their principles from the same wolf."

Of intemperance he observes, that "it was the sop that slid the devil into Judas, and the glutton that ushered in the traitor." In his sermon on "The Measures of Conscience" he speaks of "that mysterious, extraordinary book called the 'Revelation,' which the more it is studied the less it is understood, as generally either finding a man cracked, or making him so." Speaking of "the strange new postures used by some in the delivery of the Word, — such as shutting the eyes, distorting the face, and speaking through the nose," — he says that "it cannot so properly be called *preaching*, as *toning* of a sermon;" and of their "impertinent and unpremeditated enlargements" on Scriptural citations, he adds: "This they call a *saving way* of preaching, — as it must be confessed a way to save much labor, and nothing else that I know of." Again, he de-

clares that in their prayers they "do not supplicate, but compliment, Almighty God;" while in their sermons they "lie grovelling on the ground in a dead and contemptible flatness, passing off dulness as a mark of regeneration." Of "the old, exhausted, decrepit sinner, creeping, as it were, to the devil on all fours," he says that "he is a wretch so scorned, so despised, and so abandoned by all, that his very vices forsake him." Referring to the idolatry of the Egyptians, he asks: "Is it not strange that a rational man . . . should bow himself before a cat, adore leeks and garlic, and shed penitential tears at the smell of a deified onion?"

Wittier even than South — indeed, the prince of all the wits in holy orders in England before the days of Sydney Smith — was Thomas Fuller. Of him it may be said, so unique are his writings in their quaintness and mirth-provoking qualities, as Byron said of Sheridan, that Nature, after framing him, broke the mould. Of all those "honest old fellows in leathern jackets," as Lamb lovingly calls the early English writers, he is one of the few who are luminous as well as voluminous, and never dry or tedious. No writer, old or new, better abides the *ad aperturam libri* test. Pitch where you will in his pages, you are sure to light upon something which piques curiosity and rewards attention. The dryest and most unpromising matter of fact suggests to him some quaint conceit, some pregnant reflection, some queer inference, some droll allusion, some comic story, or at least some sportive alliteration or ludicrous pun. The stalest and most threadbare jest, the most hackneyed incident, the repetition of which by another would only provoke our nausea, receives from him a redintegration of essence like the conversion of dry bones into living beings.

Fuller's most popular work is "The Holy State and the Profane State,"—a collection of essays and characters, published in 1642. Speaking in this work of Dr. William Perkins, of Cambridge, he says that "he had a capacious head, with angles winding and roomy enough to lodge all controversial intricacies;" and again, that "an excellent chirurgeon he was at jointing of a broken soul, and at stating of a doubtful conscience. . . . He would pronounce the word *damn* with such an emphasis as left a doleful echo in his auditor's ears a good while after; and when catechist of Christ's College, in expounding the commandments, applied them so home, able almost to make his hearers' hearts fall down, and hairs to stand upright." Dr. Perkins, he adds, "was lame in his right hand; yet this Ehud, with a left-handed pen, did stab the Roman cause." Commenting on the precept of the Apostle Paul, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," he cautions us that we must take his meaning, not his words, else "might our wrath lengthen with the days; and men in Greenland, where a day lasts above a quarter of the year, have plentiful scope of revenge." Of Gustavus Adolphus he says that he was too much given to anger; "but afterwards he would correct himself, and be choleric with his choler." What can be more superlatively ridiculous than the reason which this *naïve* humorist assigns for the *order* of Paul's admonition to husbands and wives in the third chapter of Colossians? "Sure it was fitting that women should first have their lesson given them, because it is hardest to be learned, and therefore they need have more time to learn it." How drolly he subtilizes on the memory: "Philosophers place it in the rear of the head; and it seems the mine of memory lies there, because there men naturally dig for it, *scratching it when they are at a loss!*"

Passages like these might be quoted by scores and hundreds from Fuller. Everywhere in his pages one meets with the same mingled wit and shrewd sense, the same hearty and chuckling fulness of mirth, which catches at a joke as a boy does at a butterfly, and impresses every possible quirk and quip and play of words into its service. Few writers have more wisdom. In his merriest conceits there is a vein of sterling sense. After the flash of fire, if you look down into the crucible you will find a large residuum of gold. But wit was the main stuff and substance of his intellect; in quality and quantity it was literally portentous. He is witty, not consciously, or "with malice prepense," but by the very necessity of his nature. Quips and puns and "quirkish reasons" are as natural to him as it is for a bird to sing, for a grasshopper to chirp, or for a dog to bark. His mind was an inexhaustible fountain of fun, a living spring of jest and merriment, not a forcing-pump. One of the most marked peculiarities of his wit is that it is never stinging or ill-natured. Probably no other writer, with such a weapon at his command, ever used his wit so gently; in not a page, not a sentence even, is there bitterness or sarcasm. Moderation was his favorite virtue. His pet and oft-repeated illustration is that to use force (with schismatics, opponents, etc.) is to knock a nail into a board without "wimbling" a hole for it, — "which then either not enters, or turns crooked, or splits the wood it pierceth." Even when an irresistible sense of the ludicrous compels him to notice men's follies and foibles, he does it in such a way as to show that he loves his fellow-beings all the better for their peccadilloes and absurdities. The overflowing *bonhomie* which pervades all his jokes, his genuine Christian courtesy, and his bubbling animal spirits,

must have made even the subjects of his drollery join in the laugh which it occasioned.

It is, again, greatly to the credit of Fuller that, gifted with such a marvellous wit, — a wit so superabundant and brilliant that it has cheated him out of the reputation due to his wisdom, — he never abused his gift by making a clown of himself, or by jesting on sacred things. Though the wittiest man of his day, he was never willing to "court a grin when he should woo a soul." If we find him indulging in vivacious pleasantry, even in the most tragical parts of his histories, and narrating the most doleful events in a way to set all gravity at defiance, we may be sure that he is unconscious of any incongruity. So exuberant is his wit that even his melancholy is mirthful, and his pathos takes the form of a droll conceit. Thus, speaking of Philemon Holland, a translator, he says: "The venerable translator was translated into heaven in the year 16—." If he has occasion to express sympathy, it is testified by a perfect shower of puns, quibbles, quaint quotations, and queer analogies. Narrating a "lamentable accident" which befell a Roman Catholic congregation at Blackfriars, he says: —

"The sermon began to incline to the middle, the day to the end thereof, when, on the sudden, the floor fell down whereon they were assembled. It gave no charitable warning groan beforehand, but cracked, broke, and fell, all in an instant. Many were killed, more bruised, all frighted. Sad sight, to behold the flesh and blood of different persons mingled together, and *the brains of one on the head of another!* One lacked a leg; another, an arm; a third, *whole and entire, wanting nothing but breath, stifled in the ruins.*"

Fuller's histories (of "The Worthies of England," "The Holy War," etc.) abound in "conceits that would extort

laughter from a bishop at a funeral." They are, in truth, simply a caricature of that kind of literary composition. Here are some examples of his way of characterizing noted places: "*Gibeon*, whose inhabitants cozened Joshua with a pass of false-dated antiquity. Who would have thought that clouted shoes could have covered so much subtlety?" "*Bethuliah*, where Judith struck off Holofernes' head, — though some have since struck off that story, not only from canonical Scripture, but from truth." "*Aphek*, whose walls, falling down, gave both death and gravestones to twenty-seven thousand of Ben-hadad's soldiers." Even when speaking of the massacre of the babes at Bethlehem, he cannot help mingling a pun with his pathos, and says that "the souls of these children are charitably conceived by the Primitive Church all marched to heaven as the *infantry* of the noble army of martyrs." Adrian, the English pontiff, he tells us, "held his place four years, eight months, and twenty-eight days; and Anno Domini, 1158, as he was drinking, was choked with a fly, which, *in the large territory of Saint Peter's patrimony, had no place but his throat to get into.*" Again, he speaks of the city of Og, "on whose giant-like proportions the rabbis have more giant lies."

We have already spoken of that great brawny man of genius and caustic satirist, that "soul of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place," — Dean Swift. English literary history presents few more imposing figures. He was an intellectual giant, and almost the only giant in an age when literary trimness, elegance, and grace were common enough, but when robustness and earnestness, depth and force of thought, were rare. He had a massive strength, like that of Johnson; but, unlike that other champion of Toryism,

he was a born satirist, a detective in a dean's wig, a man-hater who loved neither the world nor the world's ways, and had a standing quarrel with the whole human race. In appearance he was a swarthy, black-browed man, and had much of the *demonic* element in him. Pope, Addison, all who knew him, felt in his presence that magnetic power which Vanessa described as "so awful that it struck her dumb." No writer ever infused more of himself into his writings than Swift into every page upon which he poured the hot lava of his irony, his ridicule, or his invective. Beyond all question, he was the most powerful man of his day in England. He was master of all the weapons of satire, — irony, invective, sarcasm, raillery, ridicule; and, as Mr. Hannay says, "included in himself, like the Trojan horse, many different fighting men." "You have overturned and supported ministers," wrote Bathurst to him in 1730; "you have set kingdoms in a flame with your pen." His pamphlet on "The Conduct of the Allies" revolutionized as by enchantment public feeling regarding the war with France. It raised such a storm of indignation against the ministry that they were hurled from power, and the peace of Utrecht was concluded. Rewarded for this service, not with a bishopric, which he coveted, but with an obscure deanery in Ireland; tormented with a disease which pursued him like an assassin, sapped his vital energies, and at times unhinged his reason, — he became one of the most unhappy of men. With an ambition equal to the consciousness of his power gnawing at his heart, he longed to be in London in the whirlpool of its excitement, and was never at home in "the scoundrel island" whose cause he had championed. Yet, though "Hercules had the poisoned shirt on him all his life," he manifested at times,

with all his imperiousness, gloom, and misanthropy, a humorous side, a playful disposition, a vein of hearty, homely fun, unlike the fierce, cynical, truculent satire of his masterpieces, as his journals, letters, and verses abundantly testify.

Was ever a more cunning or laughable hoax palmed upon the world than Swift's prophecy regarding Partridge, the celebrated almanac-maker, quack, and astrologer? Having declared that this man would die upon a certain day, Swift published afterward an account of his death, written with the utmost gravity and seriousness. Partridge, unwilling to be despatched thus, replied with an assertion of his own existence, and denounced the prophet in indignant terms. Swift, undaunted, rejoined in an ingenious and most ludicrous paper, in which he adduced a host of quirkish reasons to prove that the quack was dead, — contending, with an air of the deepest sincerity, that Partridge's own testimony to the contrary could not be for a moment admitted, as he was too notorious a liar. to be entitled to belief on so important a point.

It has been justly said that it is the best proof of Swift's real greatness that with all his gravity and solid power he thus combined so much that was playful and light. He could hurl a rock like the Cyclops, or fling a pebble with the gayest warrior who ever came out to battle. Nothing surprises one more in looking over his works than the infinity of petty pleasantries in prose and verse, — parodies, burlesques, jests, epigrams, and punning letters, all replete with pungent wit and biting satire. Many of them are slight toys of the fancy, but toys executed by the hand of a master. "They are little sparkling bubbles, but they are blown from vitriolic acid." Few have excelled him in quick,

extempore flashes. In an age of brilliant talkers he stood in the foremost rank. It is difficult to say which he enjoyed more keenly, — doing kindnesses to the poor and weak, or lashing the proud and the strong. Treating a young curate of his to the last glass of wine, which was rather thick, he said: "I always keep the bottoms of my bottles for some poor thing of a parson." The poor gentleman, seeing his humor, took the wine meekly, saying he was glad enough to get any. "Then I 'm hanged if you shall drink it," said the dean; "I 'll drink that myself, — here 's a fresh bottle for you. Only I said the same to a young cleric the other day, and he did not understand me, but flounced out of the room."

How striking the contrast between the cynical, saturnine Dean of St. Patrick's and that eccentric humorist and sentimentalist, Laurence Sterne! The author of "Tristram Shandy" and "The Sentimental Journey" had plenty of artificiality, affectation, mannerism, and coarseness; but how could Goldsmith call him who has given us such a variety of original comic characters, each so distinct in his individuality, as figure in those works, "a blockhead"? What can be more masterly in conception, or more admirably finished in execution, than my Uncle Toby, the amiable enthusiast, who was so entranced in his military studies that he grudged time to shave, or change his shirt, and constantly forgot his dinner, his wound, and the world? Who can read without merriment the account of his fortifications in his garden at Shandy Hall, — his batteries of miniature cannon; the doll-houses arranged in the form of a city besieged by the Allies; and the war carried on in rigorous imitation of the war on the Continent? When Marlborough dug a trench, Uncle Toby furrowed his

bowling-green; when Marlborough opened his batteries, Uncle Toby's cannon kept up a ceaseless pop; and when Marlborough effected a breach, Uncle Toby's works met with a similar disaster. How admirable, again, are the portraitures of Mr. Shandy, with his philosophy of names, of his brother Yorick, the obstetric Dr. Slop, Corporal Trim, Susanna, the widow Wadman, the dying Lieutenant, Le Fevre, and Obadiah? All these characters, and others in Sterne's pages, are not phantoms, mere fleshless abstractions, but have the charm of life, and will go down to posterity with the creations of Cervantes. Sterne's sparkling and sensational diction has an air of false glitter; but his humor is as poignant and unique as that of Addison or Goldsmith, and his pathos is subtler than that of Dickens. Dr. Johnson used to say that nobody would eat a slice of pudding the less on hearing of the death of his dearest friend; but my Uncle Toby "laid down his knife and fork," we are told, "and thrust his plate from before him," when he heard of the distress of a perfect stranger. So great was the popularity of "Tristram Shandy" that, after the third volume had been completed, Sterne was pledged three months deep to eat venison and drink burgundy with the peers and ministers of State who scrambled for him. Of Sterne's Sermons, with Reynolds's sly-looking portrait attached, which abound in the affected pauses and abrupt transitions which disfigure his other writings, Gray once wrote to a friend: "They are in the style I think most proper for the pulpit; . . . but you see him often tottering on the verge of laughter, and ready to throw his periwig in the face of the audience."

Some of the most brilliant clerical wit has been struck out by the collision of mind with mind in conversation.

The celebrated Baptist preacher, Robert Hall, — in whose writings hardly a gleam of humor is to be found, — was distinguished in the social circle by his terse and pungent sayings, which remind one of the witty and weighty epigrams of Johnson. Indeed, the resemblance between the two men was so strong that the "Quarterly Review," in 1832, said that he was what Johnson would have been if he had been a Whig and a Dissenter. In the intensity of his likes and dislikes; in his dogmatism, his melancholy, his proneness to erect himself before man, and to prostrate himself to the earth before God; in the promptness and keenness of his retorts; and in the freedom and occasional bluntness of his sarcasms, — he again and again recalls the great literary autocrat. In rapid nimbleness of fancy and vehement rapidity of language he even transcended him. Hall's liveliness and playfulness seem the more extraordinary when we consider that all his life he was a martyr to an excruciating disease, and that both when preaching in the pulpit and when provoking laughter by his sallies in the social circle, he was rarely free from the exquisite pains that racked his powerful frame. Another circumstance which makes his witticisms the more surprising, is that he never had an opportunity of engaging in word-fence with men of equal genius. The men with whom he mingled were too inferior in ability to put him on his mettle. Imagine the brilliant and dazzling coruscations of his genius had he mingled with the wits at Rogers's table, or in the polished circles of Holland House!

Hall's power of instantly characterizing a scene, a book, or a person, was extraordinary. Speaking of a book by an acquaintance, he said one day: "The writer appears to me to have set out on a race after obscurity, and to have over-

taken it." Dr. Gill's works he said were "a continent of mud," and the writings of Owen "a valley of dry bones." Having read the Life of Bishop Watson, he said: "Poor man, I pity him! He married public virtue in his early days, and seemed forever after to be quarrelling with his wife." A gentleman having said to the preacher one day: "And so, Mr. Hall, they say that you are about to marry Miss ——!" Starting back, Hall exclaimed: "Marry Miss ——, sir! marry Miss ——! I should as soon think of marrying Beelzebub's eldest daughter, and going home and living with the old folks!" His genius for happy retort never slumbered. In his young days he was engaged to be married to a Miss Steel: the engagement was broken off; but once, while he was staying at the house of a friend, he was so lost in thought that a lady tried in vain to engage him in conversation. At length, impatient with his reveries, she said flippantly: "Ah! sir, if we but had polished *steel* here, we might have secured some of your attention; but—" "Madam," replied the roused preacher, "make yourself quite easy; if you are not polished *steel*, you are at least polished *brass!*" Hall had an intense abhorrence of religious cant, to which he sometimes gave expression in the bluntest and most sarcastic terms. A young minister who was visiting him spent a day in sighing, ever and anon begging pardon for his suspirations, saying that they were caused by grief that he had so hard a heart. When the lamentations, which Hall had borne patiently the first day, were resumed at breakfast on the second, he said: "Why, sir, don't be cast down; remember the compensating principle, and be thankful and still." "Compensating principle!" exclaimed the young man; "*what* can compensate for a hard heart?" "Why, *a*

soft head, to be sure," said Hall, who, if rude, had certainly great provocation.

For all whining pietists, all pretenders to ability, all oracular utterers of common-place, all anglers for praise, in the pulpit or elsewhere, he had an ineffable contempt, and in the expression of it reminds one of Longfellow's Northern Jarl, whose —

> "Loud laugh of scorn
> From the deep drinking-horn
> Blew the foam lightly."

One day a sickly, querulous old man belonging to his congregation met him in the street and said: "Ah! Mr. Hall, you have — never — been to see me. Sir, I've — I've — I've been very ill; I've been — at death's door, Mr. Hall." "Why did n't you step in?" was the response. When asked for advice by a young man who desired to enter the ministry, and who gave as a reason for this desire that he must not hide his talents in a napkin, the preacher replied: "Then put them in a pocket-handkerchief, sir; that will be large enough." To another young man whom he had heard preach, and who at dinner in a common friend's house annoyed him by trying again and again to learn his opinion of the discourse, he said at last, when worried beyond endurance, "Well, sir, there was one fine passage, and I liked it much, sir, much." Rubbing his hands with glee, the young man begged Hall to name it. "Why, sir," was the mortifying reply, "it was your passage from the pulpit to the vestry." The great preacher keenly enjoyed social intercourse, and often regretted that in the excitement of conversation he was tempted to indulge too much in jest and sarcasm. We cannot help sympathizing with him, nevertheless, in his biting rebukes

of those whose piety seemed to consist chiefly in looking like owls and behaving stupidly.

Robert Hall was a warm admirer of Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen; and in an apology for the freedom of the Press, delivered a spirited eulogium on that philosopher, who was also a Unitarian divine. When, shortly afterward, he met in a street at Cambridge a gentleman who held Priestley's theological opinions, — "Oh, sir!" said the latter, tapping him on the shoulder, "we shall have *you* among us soon, I see." "*Me* among *you*, sir! *Me* among *you!*" exclaimed the preacher, startled and offended by the rude tone of exultation in which this was said, while his nostrils distended, and a sneer of the proudest disdain curled on his upper lip: "Why, if that were ever the case, I should deserve to be tied to the tail of the great red dragon and whipped round the nethermost regions to all eternity!"

Of all the clerical wits that have delighted and instructed mankind, Sydney Smith was unquestionably the chief. Though familiar with the best books, he was no pedant, but genial and well-bred, with the large, natural, sunny instincts, the thoughts, tastes, and habits, of a man of the world. His wit, it has been well said, was, like Voltaire's, the wit of everybody, — wit which you can quote upon every topic of talk that starts up in the legislature, in the newspapers, on the croquet-lawn, or in a club smoking-room. Devoid of all cynicism and bitterness, intolerant only toward cant and hypocrisy, he united a keen and incisive wit with a vigorous and practical common-sense; so that while at one minute he banished all seriousness, he destroyed in the next some prejudice or superstition that had for a thousand years defied the attacks of

reason and ridicule. The chief characteristic of his wit is its laughter-provoking extravagance. Examples of this are his hyperbolical description of a fat Irishwoman (quoted on p. 23); his saying that he was twelve miles from a lemon; and his hit at a reviewer of the Utilitarian school, that he was so hard that you might drive a broad-wheeled wagon over him and it would make no impression, — "if you were to bore holes in him with a gimlet, I am convinced sawdust would come out of him." What can be droller than his remark, in the same vein, after having been shampooed at Brighton: "They squeezed enough out of me to make a lean curate;" or his observation when, sitting quietly with some ladies at the deanery of St. Paul's, he was told that one of the giraffes in the Zoological Gardens had caught a cold, — "Fancy a giraffe with a sore throat!" How that "fool's-cap of London," as Byron called the dome of St. Paul's, must have shaken and rung with laughter when the two facetious canons, Sydney Smith and Barham of the "Ingoldsby Legends," cracked their jokes and told their merry stories beneath it!

One of the great delights of Sydney in conversation was to tickle the ribs of his hearers with a succession of exquisitely ludicrous images, following each other so rapidly as to produce a kind of avalanche of fun; as, when learning from the newspapers that Sir Æneas Mackintosh was come to town, he drew so ludicrous a caricature of him and Lady Dido, for the amusement of their namesake, that Sir James Mackintosh rolled on the floor in fits of laughter, and the caricaturist, striding across him, exclaimed: "Ruat Justitia!" Speaking of a person who was fond of contradiction, the wit said that he would throw up the window in the middle of the night and contradict the watchman calling

the hour. What a unique conceit Sydney's saying of a certain dean, that he deserved to be preached to death by wild curates! In what other brain could have originated the advice the wit gave to the Bishop of New Zealand, just before his departure for that cannibal diocese, — "A bishop should be given to hospitality, and never be without a smoked little boy in the bacon-rack, and a cold missionary on the side-board!" How unique his compliment to one of our American historians: "When Prescott comes to England, a Caspian Sea of soup awaits him;" and, again, his prediction regarding the intolerance of the Methodists, — for whom he had a strange, unreasonable dislike, — that the day would come when four old gentlemen would be seen playing long whist in lonely places of the hills, with scouts out to watch Methodist dragoons! What can be more amusing than his list of tortures, thrown off in a conversation at Romilly's on the tortures invented by Dante, — dooming Mrs. Marcet, for example, to listen for a thousand years to conversations between Caroline and Emily, where Caroline should always give wrong explanations in chemistry, and Emily in the end be unable to distinguish an acid from an alkali; and Macaulay have false dates and facts of the reign of Queen Anne forever shouted in his ears, all liberal opinions ridiculed in his presence, and unable to say a single word in their defence! "Yes," he said one day, "you find people ready enough to do the Samaritan without the oil and twopence."

Rogers said that whenever at his dinners the conversation was getting dull, Sydney Smith threw in some touch which made it rebound and rise again as light as ever. He was fond of telling a good story; and one that haunted his brain for weeks was that of a tame magpie in a church that

suddenly descended on the reading-desk and endeavored to fly off with the sermon, and of the desperate struggle that ensued between the bird and the preacher, — "the *congregation* all in favor of the pye." As the witty divine began to go down the hill of life, the gout paid him several visits, but did not check his flow of humor. In his seventy-fourth year he wrote to a French gentleman: "I dine with the rich in London, and physic the poor in the country, — passing from the sauces of Dives to the sores of Lazarus." He even jested on his disease, and not long before he died said: "I feel so weak, both in body and mind, that I verily believe that if the knife were put into my hand, I should not have strength or energy enough to stick it into a Dissenter." Under the last regimen of his physician he said to his friend, General Fox: "Ah, Charles, I wish I were allowed even the wing of a roasted butterfly!"

When, in our undergraduate days, we were inducted into the mysteries of "Barbara" and "Celarent," "Ambiguous Middles," and "Ignoratio Elenchi," we little dreamed that the author of our text-book on logic, Richard Whately, was the inveterate joker that his Memoirs now show him to have been. In the chapter on "Puns and Punsters" examples have already been given of the inexhaustible fund of wit and humor that was constantly flowing from his brain. To the odd analogies, jests, and riddles that he perpetrated there was no end. Even after he was honored with the mitre, he continued to be the same jovial, free-and-easy, mirth-loving man as when a Fellow and college-master at Oxford. At his festive meetings, we are told, there was no starched and straight-laced formality, but the fullest *abandon* and the heartiest enjoyment reigned around. Logical puzzles, metaphysical speculations, and rivalry in

pun-making were as common there as the highest tests and tournaments of wit. One of his favorite amusements was to poke fun at people who will think philosophically upon questions that require only the simplest common-sense. Having once invited the Provost of Trinity, the Commander of the Forces, and many other bigwigs to dinner, he propounded the problem: "Why do white sheep eat so very much more than black ones?" Many and plausible were the reasons suggested. One profound thinker was of opinion that since black attracts the sun, black sheep could do with less nutriment than the others. Whately shook his head and gravely explained: "White sheep eat more than others because there are more of them." Again, he asked one day: "Why does the operation of hanging kill a man?" A physiologist replied: "Because inspiration is checked, circulation is stopped, and the blood suffuses and congests the brain." "Bosh!" replied his Grace; "it is because the rope is not long enough to let his feet touch the ground!"

Some of Whately's personal thrusts were as blunt as Johnson's. What can be finer than the way in which he snubbed a young artillery officer at one of the Dublin Castle *levées*, who was allied to him in blood? "What is the difference," asked the officer, "between a donkey and an archbishop?" Whately gave it up, and received the following reply: "The one carries his cross behind, and the other before" (referring to the marks of the cross on the backs of the domestic ass and on the apron of an archbishop). "Very good indeed," said Whately, laughing. "And now can you tell me the difference between a donkey and a captain of artillery?" "No, indeed I cannot," replied the officer. "Nor I either," rejoined Whately. Turn-

ing to a junior clergyman one day, he asked: "What is the difference between a form and a ceremony? The meaning seems nearly the same, yet there is a very nice distinction." Various answers were given. "Well," he said, "it lies in this: you sit upon a form, but you stand upon a ceremony." One of his latest charades was this: —

> "When from the Ark's capacious round
> The beasts came forth in pairs,
> Who was the first to hear the sound
> Of boots upon the stairs?"

Whately had a great many intellectual hobby-horses which he loved to ride, — in fact, a whole stableful. He took up and made a recreation of paradoxical doctrines, just as he took up the boomerang, and was to be seen on the sands casting it from him and watching its return. A great deal of his extravagant humor is said to have been deliberately used as a stimulant to laughter, which he deemed a wholesome exercise for persons suffering from overwork and nervous exhaustion.

The wit of Father Mahony, who quaintly characterized himself as "an Irish potato seasoned with salt," is well known. That of the severe thinker and subtle theologian, Dean Mansel, is familiar to few. But for the testimony of the "Quarterly Review," which gives the following proofs, who, that has read his "Limits of Religious Thought," and found himself helplessly writhing in the gripe of its iron logic, could believe that the author of that relentless and question-stifling work was a punster?

"It was a common-room dinner-party. The cook had written in his bill of fare 'Reforme Cutlets.' The paper went the round of the table, and provoked many a smile. At last it reached Mansel. 'Oh! the man is quite right.' (Every eye was of course

turned in one direction.) 'Reform generally ends in *e mute.*' One whom he was showing round St. Paul's complained of the heathenish characters of the monuments. 'Just look at that now,' pointing to a huge figure of Neptune: 'what has that got to do with Christianity?' 'Tridentine Christianity, perhaps,' suggested Mansel. His friend Professor Chandler relates that on their way through the Schools one afternoon, just as they came in sight of the Clarendon building, he observed: 'Somebody told me the other day that the statue there,' pointing to the figure in the niche, 'has no back to it, — is, in fact, a mere shell; a front and nothing more.' 'You mean,' rejoined Mansel, 'that it is the Hyde without the Clarendon.' His sister relates that one evening Chandler, having played something on the piano, was requested to sing, which he declined to do. Another person pressed him, and suggested: 'If you can think of nothing else, sing us the Hundredth Psalm.' 'No, I should only murder it.' This produced a third entreaty, and a more resolute refusal; whereupon Mansel came to his friend's rescue, remarking that 'Chandler naturally declines to murder all people that on earth do dwell.' Once more. It was a severe day at the end of March, and some one inopportunely reminded the company of the saying that 'March comes in like a lion, and goes out like a lamb.' 'Umph!' ejaculated the wit; 'it's cold lamb, though.'"

Mr. Spurgeon, the celebrated London preacher, is noted for his keen mother-wit, which betrays itself occasionally even in his sermons. He once said that some ministers would make good martyrs; they are so dry that they would burn well. "Brethren," he observed one day, "if God had referred the Ark to a committee on naval affairs, it is my opinion that it would n't have been built yet." In another discourse he said: "You have heard of the man who diminished his dose of food every day to see on how little he could live, till he came to half a biscuit, and then died; but, I tell you, most of you have tried on how little religion you could live, and many of you have got to the

half-biscuit dose." These piquant sayings, which serve to keep the hearer's attention alive, are but the foam of Spurgeon's oratory; the torrent which casts them up has been justly characterized as broad, deep, and of overwhelming power.

To pass from transatlantic to our own American clergymen: old Dr. Nathaniel Emmons, of Franklin, Mass., was noted as much for his pungent witticisms as for his iron logic. "I hope I did not weary you by the length of my sermon, doctor," said a young preacher at dinner, after having held forth in his pulpit. "No; nor by its breadth either." Dr. Emmons and Dr. Griffin, once of Andover, and afterward President of Williams College, were personal friends. The former published a sermon, on a cardinal doctrine in theology, which was not favorably regarded by many of his Orthodox brethren, and elicited the following curt letter from Dr. Griffin: —

DEAR SIR, — I have read your sermon on the Atonement, and wept over it. Truly yours, E. D. GRIFFIN.

Dr. Emmons at once replied: —

DEAR SIR, — I have received your letter relative to my sermon, and have laughed over it. Yours truly,
NATH'L EMMONS.

A plain-spoken and caustic preacher of "the olden time" was Timothy Alden, who was a pastor in Yarmouth, Mass., for fifty-nine years. When a female parishioner told him one day that she was not profited by his preaching, he silenced her on the next Sunday with the text: "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The supply of wood for the parsonage having failed one week, he preached so vigorously from the

text, "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out," that on the next day he was abundantly provided. About fifty years ago, an old, eccentric clergyman, —— Milton, died at Newburyport, Mass., who was very sensitive to inattention on the part of his hearers, which he did not hesitate to rebuke at once. As he was preaching on one warm afternoon, he saw that a parishioner in the gallery, whose Christian name was Mark, was sound asleep. Pausing suddenly in the midst of a sentence, and raising his voice to the highest pitch, the preacher exclaimed, "MARK!" Jumping up, as if a thunderbolt had fallen near him, the delinquent rubbed his eyes, and staring wildly about, was wondering who called him and for what purpose, when the preacher, dropping his voice, went calmly on to finish the following passage from the Scripture, as if it had formed a part of his sermon: "Mark, I say, the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." Another witty preacher in Newburyport was Leonard Withington, whose papers, entitled "The Puritan," sparkle with Addisonian humor.

Lyman Beecher was full to bursting with wit and humor; the witticisms of Henry Ward, his son, would fill volumes. He once preached a sermon vindicating the doctrine of "Total Depravity," the shrewd, pithy, pungent sense and unique illustrations of which kept the faces of his hearers rippling with smiles. Dr. Nathaniel Colver, formerly pastor of the Tremont Temple Church, Boston, had a sharp native wit. He was once presiding at an Anti-Slavery meeting in the Temple, where the applause and the hisses with which the speakers were greeted were about equal in frequency and vehemence. Stepping forward on the platform, Dr. Colver begged his Anti-Slavery friends to cease

stamping the floor and clapping their hands in reply to the hisses. "Don't you know," said he, "that you might as well try *to get the ding out of a shovel by kicking at it, as to try to stamp the hiss out of a goose?*"

Dr. Jeremiah Chaplain, first president of Waterville College, — a severe clergyman of the old school, whose gravity forbade all *jocos risusque* in his presence, — occasionally startled his hearers at church with a dry, caustic saying. Being asked to announce at the close of his sermon in the Union Meeting House, one Sunday morning, that a Universalist minister would preach there in the afternoon, he did so, and then added: "The *gospel* will be preached in the school-house at the same hour."

The wit and humor of Father Taylor, the Seamen's Bethel preacher in Boston, are familiar to all New Englanders. How happy his saying to Dr. Lowell and Channing, that they could not see a famous Methodist preacher "because he was behind his Master;" and, again, his reply when asked if his son-in-law, Judge R——, was a Christian: "Not a Christian exactly, but a very sweet sinner." What rebuke could be sharper than his remark on a man who had abused an Eastham camp-meeting in the Boston papers: "If I owed the Devil a hypocrite, and he would not take you, I would cheat him out of the debt"? Or his famous prayer against the Anti-Masons: "O Lord! make their hearts as soft as their heads"? When a pompous gentleman from the Upper-tendom appeared in his prayer-meeting once, and proceeded to deal out advice to his boys, the old man nestled and squirmed till the speaker sat down; when he broke out: "If there's any other old sinner from State Street wishes to confess his sins, let him speak now!" The following story, which is told concern-

ing the old battle between the Princeton and the New Haven theologians, shows that half-fledged divines are sometimes as ready witted as gray-headed theologians. Some years ago, at an examination of a Princeton class in theology by Dr. Hodge, the learned professor said to a student: "Tell us what we think here to be a correct view of the Atonement." "*Our* doctrine," replied the young man, "is that Christ had a specific end in view in making an atonement, and that he *died only for the elect.*" "Well, what do they teach on this point at New Haven?" "Oh, Dr. Taylor holds quite a different view; *he* teaches that God so loved *the whole world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!" It has never been decided, says the reporter of this incident, which was the greater, the consternation of Dr. Hodge at such an unfortunate answer, or the amusement of Dr. Taylor when the story reached his ear.

CHAPTER X.

THE ANTIQUITY OF WIT.

The originals are not original. There is imitation, model, and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew them. — R. W. EMERSON.

Is the rainbow less beautiful because it borrows its colors from the sun? — ANON.

IS there anything new under the sun? More than nine hundred years before the Christian era the Wise Man declared the world's exhaustion, the lack of originality, and the hopelessness of invention, in the familiar words: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." To-day learned writers tell us that such a thing as national originality, in the sense of absolutely independent initiation of ideas, does not exist. No people on the earth can claim, independently of all others, to have struck out thoughts for the good of mankind. Nearly all the supposed "new" discoveries and original inventions upon which we pride ourselves are asserted to be thousands of years old. The secret of movable types — the art of printing — is said to have been known to the Romans; and Hobbs, we are told, borrowed his lock from the tombs of Egypt. The invention of the steamboat has been ascribed to Fulton, to Fitch, to Henry Bell, a Scottish wheelwright, and to Papin, a native of Blois,

France. The last-named invented the "digester" associated with his name, also the steam-engine with a piston, and constructed a steamboat which, amid the jeers of the Hessians, was launched on the Fulda at Cassel, in Germany, and descended, with its constructor, as far as Münden, where it was destroyed by the boatmen of that town. But the mechanical force of steam was known and described by Hero, of Alexandria, who, according to M. Fournier, the author of "Le Vieux-Neuf," exhausted the theory of steam-power. After lying dormant for centuries, the thought-germ of the old Greek sprang up in the experiments of Blasco de Garay, who in 1543 propelled a ship of two hundred tons, in the harbor of Barcelona, at the rate of three miles an hour, by means of paddles moved by steam-force. It was he who first of all set steam to work hurrying vessels up rivers and on the ocean, in the teeth of contrary gales, with audacious contempt for wind and tide. M. Fournier adduces what he deems satisfactory proof that the electric or magnetic telegraph was invented more than two centuries ago; and he shows that one of the discoveries of which this century boasts as emphatically its own, — viz., photography, — was described as long ago as 1760, with even greater perfection of detail than is attained to-day, in the "Gephantie" of Tiphaigne de la Roche. There is little doubt that the ancient alchemists were acquainted with chloride of silver (under another name), and its property of receiving the impressions, in various shades, of images cast upon it by a glass.

Not only have the same dynamic ideas pervaded men's minds in different ages, but even in their delusions the thoughts of men have run in the same tram-roads. Mesmerism was familiar to bygone generations; table-turning

was practised in Rome for the benefit of the emperors; and spirits rapped in China and Thibet ages ago, and made communications as important as those of to-day.

As in science, so in literature, we find that the complaint of the Jewish sage still holds true. From the "I do not love thee, Dr. Fell," borrowed from the "Non amo te" of Martial, to the points of our best novels, the plots of our dramas, the gems of our poems, the airs of our overtures, we find that even in the most "original" works there is little fresh material, but a vast deal of reproduction, mutation, and transformation. It is only the husk or shell of thought that is the growth of our own day; the kernel of the nut was extracted long ago. Dr. Johnson once thought of composing a work to show how small a quantity of real fiction there is in the world, and that the same images, with very little variation, have served all the authors who have ever written. The deeper and more widely extended one's reading, the more repetition and sameness he finds in the thoughts and imagery of the most original authors. Roman literature is now conceded to be one immense borrowing. The most original of Latin poets, in the estimation of scholars, are Lucretius and Catullus. But "the more we study either," says a critic, "the more plain it is that both are echoes of something still more ancient. Lucretius is a phase of Græco-Roman thought turned into verse, and fashioned certainly on a foreign model. Catullus is Greek all over, — some piece of Greek painting, poetry, or sculpture preserving itself almost in every line. Seneca is no more the producer of novelties than Racine." The same writer, in speaking of modern literature, observes of Molière, who is generally deemed an original poet, that he is "only Plautus in a French court-mask." What writer,

again, is supposed to be less indebted to others than Pascal? Yet the germ of some of his finest thoughts may be found in Montaigne, who was himself a large-handed borrower, as he frankly avows. Pascal's admired and much-quoted saying that "Nature is an infinite sphere, of which the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere," has been traced through Montaigne, Rabelais, Hermes, Tristmegistus, to Empedocles, in the fifth century before Christ, and was then doubtless an antique.

Sir John Suckling has the following conceit: —

> "Th' adorning thee with so much art
> Is but a barbarous skill, —
> 'T is like the poisoning of a dart,
> Too apt before to kill."

The same illustration has been found, it is said, in the Sanscrit. Sir William Temple's illustration of the advantage of modern over ancient learning — the former being compared to a dwarf mounted on the shoulders of a giant — is quoted in that "gulf of learning," Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," from Didacus Stella, and may be found in a poem of the twelfth century. Dupin said of the Society of Jesus (the Order of Jesuits) that it is a sword with the handle at Rome, and the point everywhere ("Une épée dont la poignée est à Rome, et la pointe partout"). In 1816 J.-B. Rousseau wrote in a letter: "I have seen in a little book, 'L'Anti-Coton,' that the Society of Jesus is a sword, the blade of which is in France, and the handle at Rome." The thought in Burns's lines, —

> "Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
> And then she made the lasses O," —

is said by some literary detective to be as old at least as "Cupid's Whirligig" (1607), in which one reads: "Man

was made when Nature was but an apprentice, but woman when she was a skilful mistress of her art." Who has not admired Byron's fine simile, —

> "So the struck eagle, stretch'd upon the plain,
> No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
> Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart,
> And wing'd the shaft that quivered in his heart."

A century and a half earlier, Waller had sung: —

> "The eagle's fate and mine are one,
> Which, on the shaft that made him die,
> Espied a feather of his own,
> Wherewith he wont to soar so high."

Nearly five centuries before the Christian era, Æschylus wrote: —

> "So in the Libyan fable it is told
> That once an eagle, stricken with a dart,
> Said, when he saw the fashion of the shaft,
> 'With our own feathers, not by others' hands,
> Are we now smitten.'"

Burgoyne, in "The Heiress," borrowed unconsciously an image of Ariosto's, and Byron used it again in his Monody on Sheridan: —

> "Sighing that Nature formed but one such man,
> And broke the die, in moulding Sheridan."

The poet Rogers, speaking of the refugees who founded Venice, says: —

> "Like the waterfowl,
> They built their nests among the ocean waves."

Gibbon says of the same persons: "The minister of Theodoric compares them, in his quiet, declamatory style, to waterfowl who had fixed their nests on the bosom of the waves."

About fifty years ago Nicholas Biddle, president of the United States Bank, delivered at a college commencement in Pennsylvania a fine literary address, an epigrammatic sentence in which was much admired and quoted: "Offices are like the tops of the Pyramids, which reptiles can reach as well as eagles." (I quote from memory.) Had he seen in the writings of the French philosopher of the century before, D'Alembert, the following sentiment? "High stations are like the top of a pyramid, accessible only to an eagle or to a creeping thing." Henry Rogers, in one of his admirable critical essays, says of that "seditious rabble of doubts" which from time to time rise to dispute the empire of the understanding in the formation of our judgments, that such a disturbance of the intellectual atmosphere "no more argues the want of habitual faith than the variations of the compass argue the severance of the connection between the magnet and the pole, or than the oscillations of the 'rocking-stone' argue that the solid mass can be heaved from its bed: a child may shake, but a giant cannot overturn it." Sir Walter Scott, long before, in speaking of Queen Elizabeth, had said that "her mind was like one of those ancient druidical monuments called 'rocking-stones.' The finger of Cupid, boy as he is painted, could put her feelings in motion; the power of Hercules could not have destroyed their equilibrium." Lord Beaconsfield's epigram that critics are persons who have failed as authors, is said to have been "cribbed" from Landor, and his picturesque saying, that "the hansom is the gondola of London," to have been "conveyed" from Balzac. The truth is, the golden chain of imitators has neither end nor beginning. Go far back as we will, we find scholars and imitators, not absolute originators and inventors. The very

artists who are regarded as pre-eminently classical, seem, as one has said, to be only a composite *rechauffée* of artists still.

The proverbs of modern nations are but echoes of the proverbs of nations that preceded them, and the latter but repetitions of sayings yet earlier. When Kelly, who undertook to gather together the Scotch proverbs, had collected three thousand, he was mortified to find how many of them were common to the English, French, Spaniards, and Italians, and even to the ancient Romans and Greeks. The knowledge of Oriental literature acquired since his day has shown that a vast number of these aphorisms originated with the older nations of the East. Many of the popular stories of modern times have a very ancient origin. The nursery tales of Jack the Giant-killer and Tom Thumb have been traced back to ancient Scandinavia, and some incidents of the former even to Oriental romance. The Germans claimed Reynard the Fox as their own property, till Grimm spoiled the conceit by discovering that he had his burrows in the previous century, and smelt like an old fox then.

If, then, our mechanical inventions and scientific discoveries were to a large extent anticipated by former generations, and if our literature has blossomed out of a boundless antiquity, can we reasonably suppose our wit and humor to be our own? Is there not a strong presumption that our jokes will prove, on investigation, to be more or less repetitions of those that "set the tables in a roar" in bygone times? The more we become familiar with the world's wit and humor, the more we shall be convinced that wit is an evergreen, and that humor is immortal. Clever jokes, in confirmation of the Pythagorean philosophy, never die, but

simply pass through a thousand transformations, and reappear in new and brighter or less attractive forms. The old pieces of wit, instead of passing entirely out of circulation, are recast and re-stamped, as in the mint Mexican dollars and English shillings are changed into American coins. There are jests and funny stories which may be called the Wandering Jews of humorous literature. They revolve through modern journals and social circles with a rhythmic cyclical movement, sometimes disappearing for years, then suddenly flashing again from the lips of a diner-out, or illuminating the columns of a comic newspaper. "Age cannot wither them, nor custom stale their infinite variety." Appealing to the same sense of humor as of old, tickling the human midriff as in the days of Troy, Nineveh, or before the Flood, they prove the oneness of humanity, and show that in the domain of fun, as in that of matter, nothing is lost, but in the lapse of years the jest we miss —

> "Doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange."

Nothing is more interesting than to watch the career of a witticism that has sprung from the brain of one who has a genius for jest, and to see it pass through its various metempsychoses, re-born as it is to a new life with each fresh resurrection from oblivion, or translation into a new tongue. It is like watching a soul through all its successive changes of condition in the Brahminical transmigrations. Perhaps if we could trace the entire history of some of the pleasantries and conceits which have provoked our loudest merriment, we should find them stereotyped on the crockery tablets of an Assyrian council, or eternized in the hieroglyphs of an Egyptian record. Who knows but that the

very same "old joes" which tickle the risibles of the laborer of to-day may have split the sides of the men who built the Pyramids, or of the workmen at the Tower of Babel? As an American journalist observes, "It is a strange, if not a solemn, thought, that the American of to-day may be laughing at jokes which can hardly have been fresh when the Glacial period came to an end, and the Cave-men were wagging their dolichocephalous heads at one another, and working their prognathous jaws over their banquets of raw meat."

Henry Grattan, the Irish patriot, used to tell a story of his uncle, Dean Marlay, to illustrate his favorite opinion that great wealth is more a burden than a luxury. Once, when the dean's footman was away, he ordered the coachman to fetch some water from the well. The latter objected, saying that it was his business to drive, not to run on errands. "Then bring the coach and four," said Marlay, "put the pitcher inside, and drive to the well," — which was done again and again, to the great amusement of the village. A similar story is told of Harrison Gray Otis, of Boston. Finding one morning at breakfast that the milkman had brought no milk, he asked several servants in turn to go for some to the grocery. All refused, on the ground that it was not their business. He then ordered his carriage, and asked the housekeeper to go to the market; and soon had some milk. Among the jokes which may claim a hoary antiquity, is that of the three or four wags who dine at an inn, and pretending to dispute who should pay the bill, propose to the waiter that he shall be blindfolded, and that the first man he catches shall pay the reckoning. Of course, as soon as their victim has been blindfolded, the sharpers slip one by one away, and leave him groping about the vacant

room. Every year or two, after its apparent extinction, this story, like the dreadful mariner that haunts the dreams of Poor Pillicoddy in Morton's play, "turns up again," with a new venue, in some British or American newspaper, and is laughed over as heartily as if it were now first communicated to the public. Who that can relish a jest has not been amused by Prince Bismarck's story about the Russian sentry standing in the middle of a lawn? He did not know why he was sent there, the officer who sent him did not know, nor was the Czar, when questioned, a whit more capable of giving the *raison d'être* of that stolid sentinel. It turned out that the Empress Catherine, just a hundred years before, wishing to preserve a snowdrop from being plucked, set a sentry to watch it. The snowdrop faded, summer came, and yet the sentry remained, and there he remained for a century. Just such a story, it seems, was told by General Klinger, one of Goethe's early friends; only in the latter anecdote it was a moss-rose which had been guarded for a century, and the lawn was in front of a German palace, instead of a Russian one. A London journal states that a similar tale is told in five or six countries. "In Greville's Memoirs it is related that a sentry used to stand in one of the corridors of the Foreign Office. His only business was to request all comers to 'keep to the left.' Why they should keep to the left, or why he was sent to tell them to do so, nobody knew. Finally it was discovered that, many years before, the walls having been painted, a soldier was temporarily posted there to warn people off the paint. He had remained — or rather a succession of soldiers had — ever since. . . . Finally, not to multiply these tales, not many years ago some inquisitive person noticed that year after year the sum of £40 was

charged in the Estimates as the salary of a non-commissioned officer in the Low Countries. He found, moreover, that it had been charged for a great number of years, — indeed, nobody remembered when it was not charged in the English Army Estimates. This led to inquiry, when it was discovered that after the battle of Malplaquet, fought in 1709, the Duke of Marlborough left a sergeant to take care of some stores. The sergeant was in time forgotten; but liking his post, took care not to remind his superiors of his existence, and so continued drawing his salary to the end of his life, and his children and grandchildren did so after him."

In Burton's "The Scot Abroad" there are several specimens of the wit of Lord Stair, at one time ambassador to France. One of these rests on his Lordship's remarkable resemblance to the Regent Orleans, who, desiring to turn a scandalous insinuation or jest on it, asked the ambassador if his mother had ever been in Paris. "No," was the reply; "but my father was." "There is perhaps no other retort on record," adds the writer, "so effective and so beautifully simple. If the question meant anything, that meaning was avenged; if it meant nothing, there was nothing in the answer." A writer, with a provokingly long memory, in the "North British Review" shows by a citation from Macrobius that precisely the same retort had been made nearly two thousand years before to the same question by the Emperor Augustus: "Augustus adduci hominem ad se jussit, visumque hoc modo interrogavit: 'Dic mihi, adolescens, fuit aliquando mater tua Romæ?' Negavit ille: nec contentus adjecit: 'Sed pater meus sæpe.'" Nor is this even the first Roman edition of the joke, for Valerius Maximus tells the same story of a Roman proconsul and a Sicilian, in whom he "caught a Tartar."

Among the finest sayings attributed to Foote the comedian is his reply to Lord Stormont, who was boasting of the great age of the wine which, in his parsimony, he was doling out in extremely small glasses, — "It is very little of its age." The same story is told of Major Logan, a merry Scotch wag, and a parsimonious gentleman of his acquaintance; and it may be found, it is said, in Taylor's "Wit and Mirth," published in the time of Charles II. Once more, we read in "Athenæus" that an under-flask of wine was sent as a present to a lady, with the intimation that it was sixteen years old. "And very small for its age," she said. A retort of Edmund Kean has a similar turn. The manager of a Scotch theatre, where Kean was playing Macbeth, offered him some whiskey in a very small glass. "Take that, Mr. Kean; it is the real mountain dew, that will never hurt you, sir." "No," said the actor, "that I'll be sworn it would n't, — if it were vitriol." Curiously enough, this *mot* of Kean is precisely the same as one ascribed by the Rev. Charles Rogers, in his "Traits and Stories of the Scottish People," to a village mason. His employer, an elderly gentlewoman, had handed him some whiskey in a diminutive glass, saying: "Ye'll no be the waur o' that, John." "Atweel, no, mem," responded the canny mason, holding up the dwarfish glass; "I wadna be the waur o' that, though it had been vitriol." In Raikes's "Diary" we are told of a sarcasm uttered against a great coxcomb, who was said to be "le plus heureux des hommes; il est fort amoureux de lui-même, et n'a point de rivaux" (the happiest of men; he is greatly in love with himself, and has no rivals). Cicero, ages before, had classed Pompey among those who are "sui amantes sine rivali" (self-lovers without a rival). Charles II. is said to have once

exclaimed: "Heaven defend me from my friends! I'll defend myself from my enemies." What is this but the thought of Publius Syrus: "Mage cavenda est amicorum invidia quam insidiæ hostium"?

A convict said to an English judge: "My lord, am I to be hanged merely for stealing a horse?" "No," was the reply, "you are to be hanged that horses may not be stolen." Was the judge a classical scholar, and had he read in Seneca: "Nam, ut Plato ait, nemo prudens punit, quia peccatum est, sed ne peccetur"? Plutarch relates that a descendant of Harmodius was taunting Iphicrates with his low birth. "The difference between us is this," the latter replied: "my family begins with me, and yours ends with you." Precisely the same retort to the same taunt is ascribed to an eminent modern *novus homo*, — Voltaire. Cicero tells us that Nasica called upon Ennius, and was told that he was out. Shortly afterward Ennius returned the visit, when Nasica exclaimed from within that he was not at home. "What!" cried Ennius, "do not I know your own voice?" "You are an impudent fellow," retorted Nasica. "When your servant told me that you were not at home, I believed her; but you will not believe me though I tell you so myself." In modern books of anecdote this wit-encounter is said to have been between Quin and Foote. In how many different forms do we meet with the sarcasm contained in the following epigram: —

> "'Is n't Molly Fowle immortal?' 'No.'
> 'You lie, she is; I'll prove her so.
> She's fifteen now, and was, I know,
> Fifteen full fifteen years ago.'"

Among Cicero's *bons mots* is recorded the following. When Fabia Dolabella said one day at dinner that she was but

thirty years old, a person whispered to Cicero, who was present, that she was unquestionably far older. "I must believe her," replied Cicero, "for I have heard her say so for the last ten years."

There is a story of a culprit who, while on his way to the gallows, was offered a pardon if he would marry a certain woman. He asked to see her; she was conducted to him, when, after a glance, he said: "Drive on, hangman!" Stobæus, an old Greek writer, relates that Philoxenus was sent to the stone-quarries by Dionysius, the tyrant of Sicily, for contempt of his verses. Being recalled, he was invited to hear them again. After listening patiently for a time, he rose to go. "Whither now?" asked Dionysius. "To the quarries," was the reply. The same Dionysius, according to Diogenes of Laërtes, treated his friends like vases of good liquors, which he broke when he had emptied them. Cardinal Mazarin says the very same thing of Madame de Chevreuse's treatment of her lovers. Dr. Johnson, in a discussion with Mrs. Macaulay, said: "Madam, I am now become a convert to your way of thinking. I am convinced that all mankind are upon an equal footing; and, to give you an unquestionable proof, madam, that I am in earnest, here is a very sensible, civil, well-behaved fellow-citizen, your footman. I desire that he may be allowed to sit down and dine with us." In Plutarch we read that Lycurgus once said to a person who was commending democracy: "Try it on your own household." Among the pungent witticisms attributed to Voltaire we are informed that, having extolled Haller, he was told that he was very generous in so doing, since Haller had just said the contrary of him; whereupon the French wit remarked, after a short pause: "Perhaps we are both of us mistaken." Precisely the same

turn may be found in an epigram of Montaigne's contemporary, the Scotchman, George Buchanan, of whom Scaliger thought so highly that he preferred his epigrammatic wit to that of the most ingenious Italians, —

> "Zoile,
> Frustra ego te laudo; frustra me, Zoile, lædis:
> Nemo mihi credit, Zoile; nemo tibi."

That is, —

> "Thou speak'st always ill of me:
> I speak always well of thee.
> But, spite of all our noise and pother,
> The world believes neither one nor t' other."

But, though he got the start of Voltaire, Buchanan has not the merit of the earliest utterance of the *bon mot*. Centuries before his day Libanius wrote to Aristænætus: "You are always speaking ill of me. I speak nothing but good of you. Do you not fear that neither of us shall be believed?"

No one will be surprised to learn that any of Sheridan's good things were said before he uttered them. His reply to the man who remonstrated with him for drinking when his theatre was in flames — "Well, sir, may not a man enjoy a glass of wine by his own fireside?" — is thoroughly Sheridanish; but it is said to be as old as Hierocles. One of the most amusing Scotch stories is that told of a monk or preacher who, after holding forth one day in church with great lung-power, was flattered by seeing an elderly woman in tears, seemingly much affected by the power and pathos of the sermon. Imagine his feelings when, on asking the cause of her emotion, he was told that it sprang from the likeness of his voice to that of an ass or "cuddie" which she had lately lost! Instead of being of Scotch lineage,

this jest, according to a British reviewer, has been a standing jest against the clergy of Europe from the Middle Ages to our own time. It is related by Bonerius, a German writer of the fourteenth century, told by Poggio in the fifteenth, and re-retold by half a dozen other writers, Latin, French, and Italian.

It is told of the great advocate, Lord Erskine, that to all letters begging subscriptions of money he had a regular form of reply; namely: "Sir, I feel much honored by your application to me, and beg to *subscribe* [here the reader had to turn over the leaf] myself, *Your very obedient servant*," etc. A similar story is told of Lobkowitz, the Austrian statesman. He had an intense dislike for the Jesuits, and even his last will, which was executed in all legal form, and publicly read, bore witness to the sarcastic humor with which he loved to lash the "Spanish priests." The introduction was couched in terms of the most piteous and humble contrition; after which he proceeded to bestow on the reverend fathers, as a token of the love he had always borne to them, and for the gladdening of their hearts, eighty thousand — here the page ended; when the reader turned to the next, he found — "*board-nails for a new building.*" Fancy the face of a Jesuit priest changing from the rosy flush of expectation to the glummest expression of disappointment and mortification on hearing such a bequest read forth in public! In a late number of "Chambers's Journal" an amusing example of this form of pause is given, which occurred in a letter received by a popular physician. The doctor, having been pleased with a certain aërated water, managed, by his recommendations, to obtain for it some celebrity. For this he expected neither reward nor thanks. Imagine his surprise, therefore, when he re-

ceived one day from the makers of the aërated water an effusive letter, stating that his kind recommendations had done so much good that they ventured to send a hundred — here the page turned over. "This will never do," said the doctor. "It is very kind, but I will never think of accepting anything." Here he turned the page, and found the sentence ran: "*of our circulars for distribution.*"

Abraham Hayward observes, in the "Edinburgh Review," that the epigrammatic remark given by H. Say to Christina of Sweden, on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV., — "He has cut off the left arm with the right," belongs to Valentinian. That of the peasant to the same monarch, "It is useless to enlarge your park at Versailles, you will always have neighbors," is copied from Apuleius, and has been placed in the mouth of a Norfolk laborer in reference to the lordly domain of Holkham.

Few sayings have provoked more praise than that reported to have been uttered by Louis XII. when urged to resent an insult inflicted on him before his accession to the throne,— "The King of France does not revenge the injuries of the Duke of Orleans." De Quincey pronounces this a magnificent and truly regal speech, and adds: "Such is my English generosity that I heartily wish that the Emperor Hadrian had not said the same thing fifteen hundred years before." It is doubtful whether this statement is correct. Spartian, in his Life of Hadrian, simply says that the emperor, on meeting a personal enemy after he had come to the throne, exclaimed: "Evasisti" (you have escaped). This is far inferior in moral beauty to the sentiment ascribed to Louis. Much closer in resemblance to it is a saying of Philip, Count of Bresse, uttered when he became Duke of Savoy: "It would be shameful in the duke to

revenge the injuries done to the count." It is said that the saying of Louis, instead of being uttered in the terse form above to an individual, was the conclusion of an address to the deputies of the city of Orleans, who were told that "it would not be decent or honorable in a king of France to revenge the quarrels of a duke of Orleans." Of the thousands who quote the lines, —

> "There's many a slip
> 'Twixt the cup and lip," —

how many ever dream that it is a translation of a Greek verse — an epigram, in the original sense of the word — inscribed on a drinking-cup? Did the French king who uttered the famous *mot*, "Après moi le déluge," know that he was merely quoting from an unknown Greek of many centuries before?

There is a well-known story of Talleyrand, that he was asked on his deathbed by the king, Louis Philippe, if he suffered; and on his replying, "Yes, like the damned," the king murmured, "Déjà?" (already). The same repartee, it is said, may be found in an epigram of Le Brun, and has been attributed to several persons, but was really uttered, as already stated, by the physician of Cardinal de Retz. Scaliger tells of a proud man who, having quarrelled with the Queen of Navarre, was ordered to quit her kingdom immediately, and replied: "That I can do in a very short time." Did this give rise to the following story? "A prince of Italy, whose dominion was of very small extent, ordered a person out of it in twenty-four hours. 'The prince has been liberal,' said the banished man, 'for I can quit it in half an hour.'" There is a hackneyed story, much affected by writers of rhetorical works and by religious newspapers,

that Garrick was once asked by a clergyman why it was that actors, speaking of things imaginary, affected audiences as if they were real, while preachers, speaking of things real, only affect their hearers as with things imaginary. The actor is said to have replied: "Why, indeed, I don't know, unless it be that we actors speak of things imaginary as if they were real, while you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary." The same story has been told of Betterton and many other celebrated actors, but was original in Steele's "Tatler," where Sancroft puts the question, and "Mr. Bickerstaff" gives the answer. Once a year, or oftener, we read in the newspapers that some man gave, "the other day," this equivocal invitation to an acquaintance: "If, sir, you ever come within a mile of my house, I hope you will stop there." The same invitation is said to have been given by Steele to a great man of his acquaintance.

The poet Moore wrote a satirical epitaph on Southey, a verse of which runs: —

> "Peace to his manes, and may he sleep
> As soundly as his readers did."

This witticism was borrowed from an epitaph in "Ménagiana," written by La Monnoye, who in 1715 edited an edition of that work. If ever wit was original, one would suppose that it must have been that of Sydney Smith, whose mind was a spring bubbling over with comic ideas, and who had, as he said, to speak or burst. Yet his noted reply, already quoted (p. 229), when it was proposed to pave the approach to St. Paul's Cathedral with blocks of wood, was forestalled by a wit of an earlier day. Rochester had made a similar remark to Charles II. when he no-

ticed a construction near Shoreditch. So true is the saying that nothing is so new as that which is forgotten! Lord Lyndhurst used to say of Lord Campbell, when he was writing his "Lives of the Chancellors," that he had added a new terror to death. A century earlier the witty Dr. Arbuthnot called the infamous publisher Curll "one of the new terrors of death." It is said that the germ of Douglas Jerrold's joke, that "it is better to be witty and wise than witty and otherwise," is to be found in a book of "Conceits," published in 1639, in which, too, is the evergreen joke of one Gun, who, having been charged by a judge for tale-bearing, was warned to give a good report for the future. The Hon. S. S. Cox relates in "Harper's Magazine" that Mr. Archer, of Maryland, whose name on the roll of the United States House of Representatives came after that of Oakes Ames, having voted by mistake when Mr. Ames's name was called, voted again when his own name was called. He was saluted in the words of Young:

"Insatiate Archer, could not one suffice?"

In looking over an old newspaper published in 1825, Mr. Cox found that the same quotation had been addressed by John Randolph to Mr. Archer's uncle, then a member of the House, who had asked for a *second* day to speak on the Bankrupt Bill.

Even the bulls and ludicrous mistakes attributed to Irishmen, which have afforded the world so much amusement, have many of them a far more ancient origin. The story of the Hibernian who excused his ugliness by saying that he had been handsome, but "they changed him in the cradle," has been traced through Cervantes to the Greeks, and from the Greeks to the Egyptians centuries before. So the

well-known story of the Irishman reading over the shoulders of a gentleman writing a letter, is among Galland's "Remarkable Sayings of the Orientals." The Greek book "Hierocles" is well known as the fountain whence many similar stories have been drawn. The Irishman who shut his eyes and looked into the glass to see how he would look when dead; the Irishman who bought a raven to see if it would live a hundred years, as he had been told; the Highlander who undertook to accustom his horse to do without food, and lamented that the animal had died just as he had taught him his lesson, — these and many other stories, of whose antiquity few who hear them have a suspicion, are all from the work I have named. A writer in "Blackwood" tells of a gentleman who, in the course of a call upon a newly wedded pair, lifted his wine-glass toward the bridegroom, and expressed a hope that he should often have to wish him health and happiness on a similar occasion. This very story is said to be the substance of one of the *facetiæ* of Hierocles, where the unconscious joker hopes often to celebrate the same feast, and always as prosperously. There is a story of an English judge who, when a thief arraigned before him pleaded that he could not help stealing when he had an opportunity, replied: "That is just the way with us; for we can't help hanging a thief when we get hold of him." Zeno the philosopher, who believed in the Stoic doctrine of fate, made a similar reply to a light-fingered slave who excused himself for his theft by saying that he was fated to steal: "And to be whipped too" (*καὶ δαρῆναι ἔφη*). Many of my readers have laughed over the reply of the elder Dumas — who was familiar with bailiffs — when he was asked to aid in defraying the expense of burying one of these gentlemen, who had died in great

destitution. Being told that the amount desired was twenty-five francs, the great romancer pulled fifteen napoleons from his pocket and exclaimed: "Twenty-five francs to bury a bailiff! Take all I 've got, and bury a dozen of 'em!" This story has been traced to the *naïve* utterance of a French provincial magnate, as recorded by Tallemant des Réaux.

The sum of the whole matter appears to be that, as the author of "Le Vieux-Neuf" so vividly shows, the human mind moves in cycles of opinion and invention; to-day is but the repetition of former times; and "human invention, limited in little things as well as great, seems to reproduce without cessation a movement similar to that of the cylinder of hand-organs or hurdy-gurdies, which the last revolution always brings back to its first refrain."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MELANCHOLY OF WITS.

The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touch'd by the thorns. — MOORE.

"A man of great heart and bright humors, my masters, and a sorrow that sits with its head under one wing."

Are these tears in his eyes, or only the dews of mirth? Is that a furrow of pain, or a pucker of suppressed fun? — GERALD MASSEY.

AMONG the mistakes we make in judging of our fellow-men, none is more common than that of estimating the ordinary feelings or habitual temper of a writer by the tone of his literary productions. Such an estimate is especially apt to be untrue in the case of wits and humorists; for though, in the popular belief, smiles and tears are the very antitheses of each other, the truth is, that as the essence of both is sensibility, men who are easily moved to the one are, with few exceptions, no less easily moved to the other. In such men the fountain of laughter and the fountain of tears usually lie hard by each other, and the gushing waters of the one often overflow and mingle with those of its neighbor. All the higher writers who by their comic fancies have helped us "to drive dull care away," have been men who have been smitten with a sense of the solemnity of life and its infinite environments, and who have made their humor the safety-valve of a sad, earnest heart.

The authors whose mirthful fancies have most quickly dispelled our mental gloom are often men whose jests convey truths plucked from the bitterest personal experience, and whose very laughter tells of "the secret wounds which bleed beneath their cloaks." Humor, says an able writer, "is not levity, is not insane laughter. It does not result from a fortuitous juxtaposition of words or ideas, but from a deep sense of the contrasts of life, and the subtle harmony which may unite the jarring discords. Thus is pathos inseparable from humor. There are tears in its smiles; in its laughter there are convulsive sobs." How true it is that, as Hartley Coleridge affirms, —

> "Laughter is oft but an art
> To drown the outcry of the heart;"

and who has not at times felt, with Hood, who — one of the kings of merriment — sings: —

> "All things are touched with melancholy,
> Born of the secret soul's mistrust
> To feel her fair ethereal wings
> Weighed down with vile, degraded dust.
> E'en the bright extremes of joy
> Bring on conclusions of disgust,
> Like the sweet blossoms of the May,
> Whose fragrance ends in must.
> Oh! give her then her tribute just,
> Her sighs and tears and musings holy.
> There is no music in the life
> That sounds with idiot laughter solely;
> There 's not a string attuned to mirth
> But has its chord in melancholy."

No doubt wits and humorists find in the exercise of their genius a happiness which other men wot not of. No doubt there is a thrill of pleasure, rising sometimes even to ecstasy, at the first flashing of a droll idea on the men-

tal horizon; but the elaboration of it in writing, the effort to give it perfect expression, is often to the last degree irksome and painful. Many a rib-tickling production which is a source of exquisite and perennial pleasure to the public has been produced in an agony of mental misery, at the expense of the author's happiness, and perhaps of his life. Again, while wits and humorists are more keenly alive than ordinary mortals to joyous, they are also more sensitive to saddening, influences. "The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," that fall down blunted from the thicker hide of their neighbors, inflict on theirs a poignant pain. The humorous Smollett, the broad fun of whose novels seems to be but the effervescence of riotous animal spirits, touchingly acknowledges "the incredible labor and chagrin of authorship." The caustic and satirical South but spoke his own experience when he said that "never did the most pregnant wit in the world bring forth anything great, lasting, or considerable, without some pain and travail, some pangs and throes before the delivery." The gayest and most sparkling essays, poems, and tales are often but the result of a temporarily successful effort to escape from the gloom of mental depression or from the pangs of a wounded and gangrened spirit. No other men are so keenly alive to the perception and enjoyment of the ludicrous as they whose ordinary feelings partake deeply of the tragic; they fly to the comic as an escape from the monotonous gloom and wearing agony of their habitual thoughts; they cling to it with feverish fondness, from a melancholy anticipation of the gloom which will be felt in contrast at the departure of mirth. In such circumstances jokes may be said to be coined from the heart's blood, — mirth to be distilled from tears.

Who that is familiar with Rome's chief lyric poet and most brilliant satirist can doubt that, like the wits who preceded or followed him, Horace was of a melancholy, if not an unhappy, temperament? Running through his Odes, Satires, and Epistles, — peeping out under various disguises, and startling us at times where we should least expect it, even in the merriest verse, — there is an undercurrent of sadness, a despondency regarding the present, a shrinking anxiety about the future, a pessimistic feeling touching his country's moral and political condition and prospects, which are hardly less palpable in the verse where he tries to dispel the melancholy, than in that where he yields to it. At his charming Sabine farm, or amid the groves of his suburban retreat, Tibur, he longs for the excitement of Rome; in Rome he sighs for the air and quiet, the streams and moss-grown rocks, of the country, —

"Romæ Tibur amem, ventosus Tibure Romam."

Restless at home, yet finding only annoyance and discomfort in travel, he sings in mournful strain of the brevity of human life, of man's helplessness against Fate, of the death of his friends, and of "Pluto's shadowy home," which soon must be the abode of all: —

"Yes, all are hurrying fast
To the one common bourne;
Sooner or later will the lot at last
Drop from the fatal urn,
Which sends thee hence in the grim Stygian bark
To dwell for evermore in cheerless realms and dark."

Who that reads Richter's "Nicolas Margraf," and laughs over its drollery and queer conceits, for a moment dreams that this comic romance was written in an agony of heart-

break caused by the death of the author's son? He had such self-command that he went on with the story while his eyes were continually dropping tears. After passing the morning in literary composition, he spent the whole afternoon on the sofa in his wife's apartment, his head supported by her arm.

Scarron, the author of the "Roman Comique," who in spite of his diseases was seemingly the most light-hearted and buoyant of men, often writhed with pain when all Paris was laughing at his wit. Crippled, his limbs bent, his back arched so that he resembled nothing else, he said, so much as the letter Z, imprisoned for life in his arm-chair, — he laughed and jested about his sufferings; but the laugh is a rueful, hollow one, and behind the mask of raillery and fun we can ever and anon see the pangs of disappointment and remorse convulsing his face. Who can doubt that his mocking spirit, the cast of his thought, his love for burlesque, was produced in part by his bodily sufferings, as well as by the heartless and cynical spirit of the age in which he lived? How touching his epitaph, by himself! —

> "Tread softly, make no noise,
> To break his slumbers deep;
> Poor Scarron here enjoys
> His first calm night of sleep."

Molière, whose comic genius could almost "create a smile under the ribs of Death," was grave, thoughtful, and melancholy, — at times so depressed that, in vexation, he would resolve to abandon his dramatic career. His physiognomy is that of a great tragic rather than of a great comic genius; and one of his lampooners makes him figure in a satirical comedy as "Molière hypochondre." If "the jaundice in the lover's eye," the agonies which "the green-eyed monster" inflicts on its victims, were never more

powerfully depicted than by this poet, it was because he had suffered all the misery he has so vividly painted. Molière was often himself *Le Cocu Imaginaire;* like his own "Misanthrope," he had experienced all the cunning cruelties of scornful coquetry, and had suffered in "the hell of lovers" the torments of his own Jealous Prince. Silent and reserved, except in the company of intimate friends, he was exceedingly methodical in all his habits; the strictest order was observed throughout his house; and it is said that the slightest derangement in his own apartment excited a morbid irritability which would interrupt his studies for whole days. Pascal furnishes a hardly less striking example of the truth, that those who by their comic genius make the world ring with laughter are often far from merry themselves. In what writer do we find a more brilliant wit, a more luxuriant irony, a more delicate raillery, united with asceticism and hypochondria?

It may be doubted whether the mighty genius that created Falstaff, Mercutio, Touchstone, and Dogberry lived — in his youth, at least — so constantly in the sunshine as we are apt to fancy. Many of his sonnets breathe the spirit of hopeless despair. He laments his lameness; deplores the necessity of "goring his own thoughts," and making himself "a motley to the view;" anticipates "a coffined doom;" and utters a profoundly pathetic cry for "restful death." To see his art "made tongue-tied by authority," — that is, enslaved by the magisterial power, — drew life-weary sighs from the poet, even in his prime. Hogarth, England's greatest comic painter, was subject to fits of spleen, and once advertised that he had determined to give the world no more of his original works, but to pass the rest of his days in portrait-painting.

Who that is not familiar with Cowper's biography would suspect the circumstances under which his comic story of "John Gilpin" was written? The poet seems to be bubbling over with animal spirits, yet in the very hour when he threw off that piece so steeped in fun, he was in a state of mental gloom bordering on madness. His biographer states that, for a while, Lady Austen's conversation had as happy an effect upon his melancholy spirit as the harp of David upon Saul. One afternoon, when he was more than usually depressed, she told him the story of John Gilpin, which had been told to her in her childhood, and which, in her relation, tickled his fancy as much as it has that of thousands and tens of thousands since in his. The next morning he told her that he had been kept awake during the greater part of the night by thinking of the story and laughing at it, and that he had turned it into a ballad. The ballad was sent to Mr. Unwin, who said in reply that "it had made him laugh tears." In one of his letters Cowper says: "If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity; a melancholy that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever made have been written in the saddest mood, and but for that saddest mood, perhaps, had never been written at all." There is, indeed, hardly a verse of his which the poet did not compose for the same reason that he painted or planed, made rabbit-hutches, or tamed hares, — to get rid of his melancholy. "I wonder," he says, in a letter to his friend Newton, "that a sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellect, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if Harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy

chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. . . . But the mind, long wearied with the sameness of a dull, dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on anything that may make a little variety in its contemplations, though it were but a kitten playing with her tail."

There have been writers who seemed to possess the power to charm only in proportion to the acuteness and intensity of their own sufferings, the force and beauty of whose minds were displayed only when disease was preying on their wasted frames, — like the dolphin, the richness and splendor of whose colors are revealed only while the unhappy fish lies panting on the deck, and the blood swiftly courses its veins amid the throes and agonies of death. It has been said of Butler, the satirist of the Puritans, that nothing remains of his private history but the record of his miseries. Though read with delight by the king and his courtiers, who carried his poem about with them, quoted it, and got passages of it by heart, and though fed with promises of princely favors, yet —

> "Of all his gains by verse, he could not save
> Enough to buy a flannel and a grave."

It was Butler's strange fate to flash into an instantaneous notoriety, which lasted just two years; to convulse court and town during that brief time with a continual shout of laughter, intermingled with inquiries as to who and what he was; and then for seventeen long years to plod on in industrious obscurity, struggling to keep the wolf from his door, still hearing his witty verse praised and quoted, but himself forgotten, — a myth rather than a man. Evidently the wit was shy, morose, and cynical, with no gift for making friends or pushing his way in the world; and but for Mr. Longueville, a bencher in the Temple, would have starved.

Gay, the careless laugher of "The Beggar's Opera," lived a sad life; and Swift, who lent him his powerful aid in its production, was never known to smile. Mr. Roscoe, in his sketch of the Dean's life, observes that, in point of natural disposition, he had all the irritability, and more than the unhappiness, peculiar to a richly gifted intellect. Then disappointment, and consequent discontent, haunted him almost from childhood, soured his temper toward the close of life, and made happiness almost impossible. "I remember," he said to Lord Bolingbroke, "when I was a little boy, I felt a great fish at the end of my line, which I drew up almost on the ground; but it dropped in, and the disappointment vexes me to this very day, and I believe it was the type of all my future disappointments." With giant energies, and no proper field for their exercise; with a soul for worship in an age of hollowness, falsity, and unbelief; coveting power and influence, yet banished to a desert; qualified intellectually, though not morally, for an archbishopric, yet condemned to preach to his own clerk and a few illiterate Irish hinds; regarding life as a curse instead of a blessing, and therefore always reading the third chapter of Job on his birthday,—he passed his life in cloud and gloom until death closed the long agony, and, as he himself expressed it in his epitaph, fierce indignation could no longer lacerate his heart. The life of Fielding, who was dogged by creditors and racked by gout, and who depended upon his pen for support, was one long struggle with ill-fortune, though, according to Lady Montagu, he forgot every ill when he was before a venison pasty, or over a flask of champagne.

Was Alexander Pope a happy man? Afflicted with asthma and dropsy, threatened with cataract, tortured with

rheumatism, and racked with constant headaches, which he vainly strove to alleviate with coffee, the poor little dwarf poet said that his life was "one long disease." Keenly sensitive regarding his deformity, he writhed under the caricatures of his enemies, and was stung to the quick by their coarse laughter, and by the consciousness, especially, that it only echoed in a more brutal way the judgment of the fine ladies of the time. Occasionally, it is true, he tries to talk lightly of these mockeries at his misfortune, — of what he calls "the libell'd person, and the pictur'd shape;" but the hand trembles as he writes. There is a smile on the shrunken face, but the hidden pain is intense. Even the consolations of his flatterers are felt as only more ingenious insults: —

> "There are who to my person pay their court, —
> I cough like Horace, and, though lean, am short;
> Ammon's great son one shoulder had too high;
> Such Ovid's nose; and 'Sir! you have an eye,' —
> Go on, obliging creatures! make me see
> All that disgraced my betters met in me;
> Say for my comfort, languishing in bed,
> Just so immortal Maro held his head;
> And when I die, be sure you let me know
> Great Homer died two thousand years ago."

Again, the fine taste of Pope was a source of pain to him as well as of pleasure. As persons gifted with exquisite sensibility to the beauty of tones are acutely pained by jarring notes, or as they who have a passionate love of method and order are shocked by disorder and confusion, so minds that keenly appreciate the beautiful in literature must of necessity be terribly shocked at the bad and the ugly. As Sainte-Beuve has finely said, exquisite enjoyment must be paid for. When one's mind is susceptible to

beauties even to the extent of shedding tears about them, as Pope did, "it is equally sensitive to defects, even to the point of being nettled and irritated at them. He who most keenly enjoys the perfume of the rose will be the first to be disgusted with bad odors. Thus no one, perhaps, has been conscious of literary stupidity and suffered from it in as high a degree as Pope." In the portraits of this "Homer in a nutshell" the thin, drawn features wear an expression of continual pain. Though his brilliant wit had so often made others laugh themselves "into stitches," yet his sister declared that she had never seen *him* laugh heartily; and strangely indeed would a hearty laugh have sounded from the "wasp of Twickenham," — from the touchy, fiery, artful little man who could "hardly drink tea without a stratagem."

Washington Irving remarks that "the elaboration of humor is a most serious task; and we have never witnessed a more perfect picture of misery than was once presented to us by a once popular dramatic author, — still, we hope, living, — whom we found in the agonies of producing a farce which subsequently set the tables in a roar." Irving's own humorous work, "Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York," was written while he was smarting under an affliction, — the loss of his first and only sweetheart, — which nearly broke his heart. When Goldsmith was composing his merriest comedy, he was harassed by debt, and wrote to a friend: "Here I am, studying jests with a most tragical countenance." It was in the chill and desolation of a fireless garret that this vagabond of literature sketched his bright pictures of domestic happiness. The gayest flights of "Don Juan" were made in the gloomiest and most desolate hours of the morbidly sensitive Byron, when, like

his own Manfred, he "felt his soul was ebbing from him," and his body, "limb by limb, destroyed." Burns confessed, in one of his letters, that his design in seeking society was to fly from constitutional melancholy; but they who were fascinated by his wit, or entranced by his eloquence, little thought that all his liveliness, keenness, and energy sprang less from an anxiety for display than from a horror of solitude. "Even in the hour of social mirth," he says, "my gayety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner." As the nightingale is said to sing most sweetly with the thorn in its breast, so the most charming songs of poets have often been prompted by the acuteness of their personal sufferings. As Shelley says, many bards —

> "Are cradled into poetry by wrong:
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

The eloquent Irish advocate, Curran, who bubbled over with wit and humor, and who was one of the quickest and happiest of men in repartee, was in private habitually melancholy. He said that he never went to bed without wishing never to rise again. The mirthfulness of Archbishop Whately did not always proceed from a mind at ease. He had a melancholy temperament, and often was saddest when his drollery gushed forth most freely. Frequently when he appeared to be bursting with fun, "stab after stab was making havoc in his heart." When, in allusion to his enemies, a newly fledged bishop boasted that he had never thrown a stone at him, "Certainly not," was Whately's reply; "you only kept the clothes of those who did." "Gay spirits," he once said, "are always spoken of as a sign of happiness, though every one knows to the contrary.

A cockchafer is never so lively as when a pin is stuck through his tail, and a hot floor makes Bruin dance."

Charles Lamb was no exception to the rule that in all true humorists pleasantry is inseparably allied with pathos. The flashes of his wit were but an endeavor to escape from the giant sorrow, the "fee grief" that weighed upon his soul. The quip on the tongue was but the commentary on the tear which trembled in the eye. "It is not only the easy laugh of Touchstone in the Forest of Arden, but the heart-rending pleasantry of Lear's Fool in the storm." According to De Quincey, it was when he yielded to the temptation of wine that the shy, sensitive humorist was joyous, radiant with wit and frolic, mounting with the sudden motion of a rocket into the highest heaven of outrageous fun and absurdity, then bursting into a fiery shower of puns, chasing syllables with the agility of a squirrel bounding among the trees, or of a cat pursuing its own tail. His thirty years' servitude at the India House made him very weary; he sat like a nightingale, he said, with his breast against a thorn, — the desk. "Thirty years," he moaned, "I have served the Philistines, and my neck is not subdued to the yoke." When his health failed, "I have," said he, "two bedfellows, — cough and cramp. We sleep three in a bed." The most facetious of all his letters was written to Bernard Barton in a fit of the deepest melancholy. In his correspondence he often speaks of his "Elia" essays as "wrung from me with slow pain. . . . I wish all the ink in the ocean dried up, and would listen to the quills shrivelling up in the candle-flame like parching martyrs." Though Lamb did not blow a trumpet at the corner of the streets, he was tried, as a sympathetic spirit has said, "as few men are, and fell not. He jested that he might

not weep. He wore a martyr's heart beneath his suit of motley. And only years after his death, when to admiration or censure he was alike insensible, did the world know his story and that of his sister Mary." [1]

Laman Blanchard wrote the most amusing of his comic sketches while tortured by the gripe of poverty, and when his wife lay at the point of death. He was a man remarkable for his amiable disposition, his general elasticity of spirit, and fine social qualities. But though he could dispel the gloom that clouded another's brow, he could not chase it from his own; the fatal termination of his wife's illness plunged him into the deepest abyss of grief, and in a fit of delirium, in the prime of his faculties, and to the horror of those who had often laughed at his jests, he cut with suicidal hand the cord that bound him to life, and thus fell a victim to the very sensibility which had won him so many friends, and was the source of the humor that had filled their hearts with sunshine. Does the reader who has felt the subtle charm of Thackeray's wit, who has sipped his humor as one sips the finest and rarest wine, suspect that the "witching turns," the playful jests which tickle his sides, are in many cases wrung from a mind filled with gloom? Yet one of that satirist's most marked characteristics, according to Dr. John Brown, was "the deep, steady melancholy of his nature." In the touching description which his "faithful old Gold Pen" gives us of the various tasks he set it to, we read, —

> "I 've helped him to pen many a line for bread;
> To joke, with sorrow aching in his head;
> And make your laughter when his own heart bled."

[1] Dreamthorp, by Alexander Smith.

Thackeray was fond of telling how, on one occasion at Paris, he found himself in a great crowded *salon;* and looking from the one end across the sea of heads, being in Swift's place of calm in a crowd, he saw at the other end a strange visage staring at him with an expression of comical woe-begoneness. After a little while he found that this rueful being was himself in the mirror! The great satirist was not morose; he appreciated and was grateful for all life's comforts and blessings; but his persistent state, Dr. Brown tells us, especially during the latter part of his life, "was profoundly *morne*, — there is no other word for it. This arose in part from temperament, — from a quick sense of the littleness and wretchedness of mankind. His keen perception of the meanness and vulgarity of the realities around him, contrasted with the ideal present to his mind, could produce no other effect. This feeling, embittered by disappointment, acting on a harsh and savage nature, ended in the *sæva indignatio* of Swift; acting on the kindly and too-sensitive nature of Thackeray, it led only to compassionate sadness."

If the life of the author of the "Book of Snobs" and "Vanity Fair" was sad, what word but *dreary* will characterize that of Theodore Hook? Blessed with the finest abilities, yet ambitious, apparently, only to sit at the tables of the great, — to buzz about their candles and consume himself for their diversion, — he worked day and night under the influence of stimulants, and thus increased the nervous agonies of a frame that had been prematurely wasted and exhausted. Meanwhile debts, debts, still debts! thronged about him, each a grinning phantom, mocking him in the midst of his delusive joys; and thus, though all mirth and jocularity abroad, he was, at home, plunged into the deep-

est dejection and gloom. At the very time when he was on the topmost wave of outward prosperity, when his wit was at the zenith of its brilliancy, when at clubs and country houses he was astonishing every one by his victorious vivacity, entries were made in his diary that reveal a broken heart, a wounded spirit, the bitterest regret for the past, and despair of the future. Such were the hidden feelings of the man whose talk had such a fascination that men dined at the Athenæum to hear it after dinner; so that the diners there fell off more than three hundred a year after he ceased frequenting that club. Worried by creditors, attorneys, and bailiffs, — multiplying instead of diminishing his habits of luxury and self-indulgence, — he became so thin that he swathed himself in wrappers to plump out his body to its wonted bulk, and at last, reduced to a skeleton, dropped into the grave.

The biographer of Grimaldi speaks of the devouring melancholy which pursued the noted actor when he was off the stage; and we are told that Liston, the high-priest of Momus, — whose face was so mirth-provoking that one could not look at it seriously, and whom thousands went to see, when they wanted to shake the cobwebs from their brain and to banish the blue-devils, — was in private life often a poor hypochondriac. On one occasion, when sadder than usual, he consulted Dr. Abernethy. The doctor saw at a glance that the case was one of extremely low spirits, and demanded medicine for the mind, not for the stomach. So, not knowing who was his patient, he said: "You only want cheering up; a good, hearty laugh would do you good. I'll tell you what 'll cure you." "What?" sadly asked the actor. "Go and see Liston," was the reply; "he'll settle you!" A similar story is told of the memorable mimic,

Carlini. Having asked a physician to prescribe for his profound melancholy, at a time when his irresistible drolleries were convulsing Paris nightly with laughter, he was told that there was but one cure, — to go and see Carlini. "Alas!" was the reply, "I am Carlini." The eloquent and witty Thomas Corwin, Ohio's Governor and United States Senator, affords a further illustration of Burns's saying, that "chords that vibrate sweetest pleasure, thrill the deepest notes of woe." A man of quick and tender sensibilities, with a brilliant wit, he in the evening of his days looked upon his life as a failure because he had not been more successful in his serious efforts. "Never," said he to a friend who had made a serious speech, — "never make the people laugh. . . . Do you know, my young friend, that the world has a contempt for the man who entertains it? One must be solemn, solemn as an ass, — never say anything that is not uttered with the greatest gravity, — to win respect."

Melancholy as have been nearly all the world's greatest wits and humorists, the saddest, perhaps, have been those who, conscious of higher powers, have been compelled to wear the jester's cap-and-bells in order to earn their bread or that of others dependent on them for support. To get one's bread by puns; to pay one's baker and butcher by painfully elaborated jocosities; to settle the house-rent and school-bills by manufactured jests, — is of all businesses the most dreary, and one which gives the most lurid and ghastly aspect to human life. To the unthinking reader who laughs over the amusing sketches and mirthful jests of the Press, nothing *seems* easier than humorous writing by one who has a genius for it; and could the editorial or contributing wit be privileged to choose and take his time

always, and write only when "i' the vein," there would be some truth in the notion. Then might one throw off rib-tickling essays, merry tales, and sparkling jests with the ease of the "Autocrat" when he wrote those lines "so queer, so very queer," that at the sixth his servant, after chuckling as if he would split over its predecessors, —

> "Burst five buttons off,
> And tumbled in a fit."

But what if the wit must be funny to order? What if the *facetiæ* must be forthcoming, nilly-willy, at certain fixed hours, — when, perhaps, he is writhing under a headache or a heartache, or depressed by blue-devils; what if he repairs to his writing-desk, not with the enthusiastic fire with which the inspired minstrel snatches his harp, but with the cold, mechanical reluctance with which the weary operative sits down to his loom, and where once his witticisms are thrown off spontaneously, they are twenty times wrung from him *invita Minerva*, by sheer, desperate effort? No matter how abhorrent his task at any time, — no matter how rugged or intractable his theme, and reluctant to be coaxed into a smile, — there is his task before him, and well or ill, cheerful or gloomy, with or without straw, his tale of bricks must be accomplished.

Half a dozen jokes a day, a column in a week, appears but a trifling thing to exact from a born *bel esprit*. But to perpetrate them, not for a week only, but for many weeks, for months, for years; to manufacture jokes mechanically, in cold blood, "with malice prepense," just as a smith would hammer out axes, or a cobbler turn off so many pairs of shoes, in a given time; to be in a position where one cannot let the jests come into the head, but the

head has to go to them, as Lamb says, where the mountain has to go to Mahomet, — ay, "there 's the rub!" Somebody has said that to swallow six cross-buns daily, consecutively for a fortnight, would surfeit the stoutest digestion. But to have to furnish as many jests daily, and that not for a fortnight merely, but for a summer or winter, a whole twelvemonth; to be forced to be funny from January to December, perhaps for a series of years, —

> "Turn thy complexion there,
> Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubin!"

If wit were like an ague, and one could count on tertian fits, it would be safe to speculate in advance on being clever or cold at such and such an hour. But whatever the law in political economy, there is no certainty that in wit or humor the demand will be sure to create a supply. The horrid necessity of being witty to order, only they can appreciate who have had actual experience of "wringing out coy sprightlinesses" for the Press, of writhing under the toil of what is called "easy writing." It is this which determines whether one is trading on a full stock, or but a small capital; whether his fountain of wit or humor is deep, and fed by many springs, or shallow; whether, "if he should have the ill-hap at any time," as South says, "to strike a man dead with a smart saying," it should be judged the effect of design, and of "a standing ability of mind," or "but a chance-medley."

It was such a dreary life as this that poor Thomas Hood was doomed to live, — spending his days in making the public merry, conscious all the while that he was meant for other and nobler work. He lived under the stern taskmaster, Necessity, and had, as he himself so quaintly and

pathetically said, to be a lively Hood for a livelihood. It was only because he had hungry mouths to fill, a family of near and dear ones to support; because the world, more willing, as it always is, to pay for what would make it laugh than for what would make it think or weep, discovered his wealth of wit, and insisted on drawing upon it, — that he wore the jester's motley, and squandered his genius upon comic sketches and puns. Hood's life was a long disease, — a hand-to-hand, foot-to-foot struggle day by day with adversity for the means of living; and often when he put on a sunny face, it was to hide from his friends the agony that gnawed within. He turned even his sickness to account, by making it the theme of side-splitting fun, and his rare wit could extract humor from the gout. "Can you laugh?" asks Thackeray, after quoting one of Hood's puns made *in articulo mortis*. "Is not the joke horribly pathetic from the poor dying lips? As dying Robin Hood must fire a last shot with his bow; as one reads of Catholics on their death-beds putting on a Capuchin dress to go out of the world, — here is poor Hood at his last hour putting on his ghastly motley, and uttering one joke more." It has been observed that so inextricably were the lines of tragedy and comedy interwoven in the web of Hood's mind that even his most serious poems have sometimes a half-grotesque appearance. An occasional verse or phrase reminds us very remotely of the laughing face which so often lurks behind the mask; and we sometimes pause to ask ourselves, — is it indeed the mask, or the face? On the other hand, amid his gayest laughter he sometimes touches for a moment a chord of deep melancholy, reminding one of that long, thrilling note of the nightingale, which, it is said, comes piercing through her merry ecstasy with such a

heart-cry of yearning pathos. It was indeed only the thinnest of partitions that, in the author of "The Bridge of Sighs" and "A Tale of a Trumpet," divided tears from laughter; his wit was in most cases the heat-lightning that frolics about the gathering gloom of a coming night. Yet, as Gerald Massey in his admirable tribute to Hood's genius in the London "Quarterly Review" has said, "Out of all his sufferings he secreted a precious pearl of poetry, which will be 'a thing of beauty;' and in spite of the poverty and pain, he shed on the world such a smile of fun and fancy as will be a memory 'forever.'"

CHAPTER XII.

MEN WHO LACK THE SENSE OF HUMOR.

An all were o' my mind, wit would be out of fashion. — TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, ii. 3.

> Seldom he smiles; and smiles in such a sort,
> As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit
> That could be mov'd to smile at anything.
>
> JULIUS CÆSAR, i. 2.

OF all the forms of self-ignorance, few are more common than the belief of men who lack the sense of humor that they possess it. Many persons will acknowledge that they are indolent, luxurious, or fond of praise or of money; but they will no more admit their deficiency in humor than their deficiency in sound judgment or ability to reason logically. Almost every man is conscious that certain incongruities or ludicrous incidents and situations tickle him, and therefore flatters himself that he appreciates humor. But humor and the ability to relish it are among the latest products of civilization, — the last mental gift that reaches perfection. The farther we go back in the history of the human race, the nearer we come to the primitive man, the graver and more serious do we find man to be, — or, rather, the less disposition to be merry does he betray. To such a man life is too earnest for laughter; living among venomous reptiles and ravenous beasts of prey, — exposed continually to attacks by other savages, to starvation, and to innumerable unseen dangers, — he is in no mood for merriment, and

has no taste for fun. It has been conjectured that the nearest approach to humor among savages must have occurred to the conquerors when they were torturing and slowly murdering their captured enemies, whose writhings and grimaces yielded them a kind of grim amusement, though coarse and brutal. A tribe, called Weddahs, has been discovered in Ceylon who never laugh, and have no more conception of what a joke means than a dog.

The early English people had apparently but a slight sense of humor. We talk of our "rude" English ancestors, but we never understand how rude they were till we look into an old jest-book. An early chronicler, after recording a mediæval pun perpetrated by Richard the Lion-hearted, — "a ponderous joke, dull enough to have put out the fire," as Plutarch says of one which Hegesias of Magnesia was inspired to construct, — calls attention to it on the margin of the manuscript by a *Nota jocum Regis*. The historian Hume, on examining a manuscript containing an account of some private disbursements of Edward II., found among the items one of a crown paid to somebody for making the king laugh, — which seems to imply that such a royal diversion was a rare luxury. The sayings and doings of court-jesters that have come down to us show that the English did not always have the keen sense of the ridiculous which they now manifest, but were slowly and painfully educated into it by a training in ponderous puns and practical jokes. It has been affirmed, though, as we think, without truth, that the French have no sense of humor. An English reviewer goes so far as to say that a Frenchman cannot understand irony; that his own is *badinage*, — a shuttlecock tossed between opposite players, who have no other thought than to keep it up skilfully. "The heavy English irony,

with its undercurrent of earnest, seems to him spiteful and cruel; he cannot comprehend men who hit one another so hard in jest." The facts do not sustain this assertion. If there is no irony in Rabelais, Voltaire, or Pascal, where shall we find it? Had Voltaire's victims any difficulty in discovering his irony, or the Jesuits that of the "Provincial Letters"?

Again, the Germans are said to lack humor; they are too elephantine, too metaphysical, too matter-of-factish, and too sentimental, it is thought, to perceive humor. Jean Paul says of his countrymen: "I know the Germans; like metaphysicians, they wish to know everything from the bottom, very accurately in large octavo, with no excess of conciseness, and with a few citations. They rig out an epigram with a preface, and a love-madrigal with a table of contents. They determine the course of the zephyr by a sea-compass, and the heart of a girl by conic sections. Like merchants, they mark everything with capitals, and prove everything like jurists. The membranes of their brains are living memorandum-books; their legs are secret metewands and pedometers. They cut asunder the veil of the Nine Muses, and measure the hearts of these girls with compasses, and their heads with a gauge." Yet was not the author of this very satire a humorist, and that, too, of the most dare-devil, grotesque, and eccentric kind, — a humorist surpassing, in the estimation of some acute critics, even Cervantes himself? And how about Heine, with his weird fancies, wild fun, and airy riot? — he who felt one day at noon "as though he could devour all the elephants of Hindostan, and then pick his teeth with the spire of Strasburg Cathedral;" who tells us that he might settle in England, "if it were not that I should find there two things, — coal-smoke and

Englishmen: and I cannot abide either;" and who, in commenting on the fate of Herr Saalfeld, a professor at Göttingen (a great seat, Heine thought, of pedantry and Philistinism), who had written angry pamphlets against Napoleon, says: "It is curious, the three greatest enemies of Napoleon have all perished miserably. Castlereagh cut his own throat; Louis XVIII. rotted upon his throne; and Professor Saalfeld is still a professor at Göttingen." Had Heine no wit?

But though the French and Germans are far from being devoid of humor, they certainly are not overstocked with it; and even among English speaking peoples, not only the thing itself, but the appreciation of it, is a far rarer quality than is generally supposed. The truth is, the ability to perceive and enjoy wit and humor is a gift, an inborn capacity, as really as the ability to produce them. Just as some persons are color-blind, and cannot discriminate between red and green, blue and yellow, so others are humor-blind, and cannot discern or enjoy a burst of fun or a stroke of drollery. There are literal, unimaginative minds, to which all poetry is a sealed mystery, and there are minds that are likewise impenetrable to the feathered shafts of wit. Nothing is more humiliating than the blank look, the stony stare of indifference, with which they regard the most brilliant flashes of genius. Where is the wit who has not suffered at times the chilling, mortifying sensation of casting a joke upon stony ground, — of finding that his irony, pun, or merry quip, instead of provoking the expected laugh, is greeted with an inquiring gaze, or a request for an explanation of the meaning? Such a reception is enough to quench the most brilliant pyrotechnics, and has doubtless made many a *bel esprit* dumb for a week.

Pope never made a greater mistake than when he wrote: "Gentle dulness ever loves a joke." Dulness does not understand a joke; and how can it love what it does not understand? Above all, how can it love that which startles or shocks it, or which ruffles its sense of its own importance? What Pindar said of music, and Coleridge applied to genius, holds equally true of wit or humor: "as many as are not delighted by it are disturbed, perplexed, irritated." Light can paint no pictures to the blind; and there are crass, heavy spirits that would gaze on Leech's drawings without a smile, read Sterne or Dickens without an emotion, and hear Sydney Smith (if they could hear him and not go to sleep) without merriment. A writer in "Cornhill" asserts that all women hate humor, and that it disgusts three hearers for one whom it pleases among the males. Has this humor-hater never read the fine, sympathetic disquisitions on humor of George Eliot and Frances Power Cobbe? That this quality "disgusts" the majority, or even more than a small minority, of men is plainly untrue; and even the anecdotes told of this minority sometimes almost stagger belief. Everybody is familiar with Sydney Smith's reply to a lady who called upon him one day, and spoke of the oppressive heat of the preceding week. "Heat, ma'am!" said the clerical humorist, "it was so dreadful here that I found there was nothing left for it but to take off my flesh and sit in my bones." "Take off your flesh and sit in your bones, sir? Oh, Mr. Smith, how *could* you do that?" To another lady, who, after walking round the wit's grounds at Combe Florey, exclaimed: "Oh, why do you chain up that fine Newfoundland dog, Mr. Smith?" he replied: "Because he has a passion for breakfasting on parish boys." "Parish boys!"

she exclaimed; "does he really eat boys, Mr. Smith?" "Yes," was the reply, "buttons and all." Her face of horror, says the wit, made me die of laughing.

Among the books in my library is a life of the old divine of whom I have spoken at some length in the chapter on "Clerical Wit," — Dr. Thomas Fuller. The work is by the Rev. Arthur T. Russell, B. C. L., and was published by Pickering, London, in 1844. Though a biography of one of the wittiest men that ever lived, it is as dull as an old almanac, and as solemn as Drelincourt on Death. With a real love for the old divine, the writer, strange to say, seems almost insensible to that which, for all Fuller's other readers, constitutes his superlative excellence. While the perpetual blaze of his wit has blinded many to his shrewd sense, the biographer has lost sight of the wit in admiration of the more solid qualities. The reader's surprise could not be greater if in a life of Napoleon he should find no account of his generalship, or in a biography of Raphael no account of his paintings. In speaking of Fuller's "Good Thoughts in Bad Times," Mr. Russell says: "It is greatly to be regretted, in spite of the beauties with which the work abounds, that they are *in some instances* degraded by a quaintness that is never so much out of place as in religious meditations." "In some instances!" As if quaintness, instead of being occasional in Fuller, were not the very element in which he lives, moves, and has his being; as if his name were not a synonym for quaintness, — a quaintness which distinguishes him from other writers equally facetious, but whose wit lacks this peculiar flavor! "*Degraded* by a quaintness!" As if this quality, which in him is spontaneous, never striven for, were not one of his greatest charms!

Sterne, when noting the deficiency of some men in humor, declared that the taste for it is "the gift of heaven." It is a well-known fact, which perhaps provoked this saying of the humorist, that while more than half the people in the three kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland were delighted with his "Tristram Shandy," the rest voted it a bore. The celebrated Dr. Cheyne, though an original thinker and a man of learning, confessed that he could not read "Don Quixote" with any pleasure, and that he had no taste for "Hudibras" or "Gulliver." The "so-called wit and humor" in Butler and Swift he considered as "false ornaments," never to be found in those compositions of the ancients which we most admire and esteem. How long were Charles Lamb's works caviare to the public in general, and how few readers, comparatively, can say that they relish them to-day! A well-educated lawyer of my acquaintance seriously declared to me that "Lamb and Lowell [J. R.] were fools!"

One of the most remarkable and amusing instances of inability to appreciate wit which has come to the world's knowledge, is recorded by Samuel Pepys of himself in his famous "Diary." When the first part of Butler's "Hudibras" was published, in 1662, Pepys, hearing "the new book of drollery," which became instantly popular, everywhere talked about and quoted, bought a copy, for which he paid, he says, 2*s.* 6*d.* But when he came to read it, the stinging irony and sarcasm, as well as the broad, laughing humor, which had delighted the king, court, and people, were offensive to him; he found the work "so silly an abuse of the presbyter knight going to the warrs" that he was "ashamed of it;" and by and by, "meeting Mr. Townsends at dinner," he sold it to him for 18*d.* It seems,

however, that though he had sold the book at a shilling discount, yet the praises of its wit were so rung in his ears by all his friends and acquaintances, and it was so universally the theme of "town talk," that he felt compelled to repurchase the work ten days later, to see whether he could like its humor, or "find it out." So he went to a bookseller in the Strand, "and there bought 'Hudibras' again, it being certainly some ill-humor to be so against that which all the world cries up to be the example of wit; for which I am resolved once more to read him, and see whether I can find it or no." Whether he sold the second copy at a loss, he does not say; but while he was racking his brain in attempts to discover its wit, the second part came out. Determined not to be cheated out of his money again, yet unable to resist the temptation to read it, he adopted this ingenious expedient: "To St. Paul's Churchyard, and there looked upon the second part of 'Hudibras,' which I buy not, but borrow to read, to see if it be as good as the first, which the world cried up so mightily, though it have not a good liking in me, though I had tried but twice or three times reading *to bring myself to think it witty*." The *naïveté* of this remark is exquisite; it evidently never occurred to the diarist that the reader of a comic work who strives day after day "to bring himself to think it witty" is chasing after a will-o'-the-wisp. But poor Pepys was ashamed not to be in fashion, and so, going again to his bookseller's at St. Paul's, where he was puzzled to decide whether to lay out his money "for books of pleasure, as plays, which my nature was most earnest in," or more solid books, "I at last," he says, "chose Dr. Fuller's 'Worthys,' 'the Cabbala,' a Collection of Letters of State, and a little book, 'Délices de Holland,' with another little book or two,

all of good use or serious pleasure, and 'Hudibras,' both parts, the book now in greatest fashion for drollery, *though I cannot, I confess, see where the wit lies.*" Whether the ingenuous diarist ever afterward came to comprehend Butler's poem, he does not record; but some years later he met the satirist at dinner, and wrote of the company as "company that pleased me mightily, being all eminent men in their way. Spent all the afternoon in 'talk and mirth,' and in the evening parted."

While some men are incapable of appreciating wit, there are, on the other hand, persons who indulge in unconscious irony, — perpetrating jokes without knowing it. We have an example of this in a remark made to Dr. Samuel Hopkins, the old New England divine, by one of his parishioners. The latter having been absent many Sundays from church, the good doctor called on him, and finding him sick, suggested that, as the sick man had been so long without the means of grace, he should bring one of his sermons, and read it to him. "Do so," was the *naïve* reply; "for I have had no sleep since the attack began." No sarcasm was probably intended by the sick man; and equally innocent of any such design was the rough Tennessee soldier who, tired, after three months' experience of campaigning, asked General Thomas to grant him leave of absence, because he wanted to see his wife. "Why, I have not seen mine for three years!" was the general's reply, intended to be conclusive. But the homesick warrior was equal to the occasion, and retorted: "Wall, you see, *me and my wife ain't that kind.*" There is a story of a country carpenter who, having neglected to make a gallows that had been ordered to be erected by a certain day, was asked by the judge, who himself went to the man: "Fellow, how came you to

neglect making the gibbet that I ordered?" Unconscious of any sarcasm in his reply, the man said: "I 'm very sorry; for had I known it was for your Lordship, it should have been done immediately." Equally innocent of any evil intent was the country editor who, chronicling the death of a lady, said that she "had lived fifty years with her husband, and died in the confident hope of a better life."

Mr. Emerson, in his essay on "The Comic," tells the following pertinent anecdote: "I was hastening to visit an old and honored friend, who, I was informed, was in a dying condition, when I met his physician, who accosted me in great spirits, with joy sparkling in his eyes. 'And how is my friend, the reverend doctor?' I inquired. 'Oh, I saw him this morning. It is the most correct apoplexy I have ever seen, — face and hands livid, breathing stertorous, all the symptoms perfect.' And he rubbed his hands with delight, for in the country we cannot find every day a case that agrees with the diagnosis of the books." We have another example of unconscious humor in the entry which Lady Sale made in her diary: "Earthquakes as usual," — as if this appalling event were no rarer, and were regarded with no more awe, than a change in the weather. Similar to this was the advertisement beginning: "Anybody in want of a diving-bell," etc., — as if a diving-bell were one of the ordinary requirements of men. A clergyman was once preaching about heaven; and to show what he regarded as Swedenborg's ideas, drew a vivid picture of the Swedenborgian heaven, with its beautiful fields, fine horses, cows, and pretty women, when, in the midst of his glowing picture, one of the sisters went into raptures, and shouted, "Glory, glory, glory!" This so disconcerted the preacher that he paused, when an elder cried out to the shouter: "Hold on

there, sister! You're shouting over the wrong heaven!" Some fifty or more years ago, in northern Louisiana, there was a Judge Clairborne, who, under the old cocked hat, and with the enormous, ill-defined prerogative of parish judge, is said to have swayed his sceptre over that region with a potency and vigor almost rivalling those of a Russian czar. It is doubtful, indeed, if any "autocrat of all the Russias" had a loftier conception of his own claims to reverence and respect. Among the parish judge's multifarious powers and duties was that of auctioneer. He sold all "the property of succession" in his parish. It chanced that on one occasion, when he was selling the stock of a deceased grocer, one of the company present disturbed the order of the proceedings. The judge fined him fifty dollars, and sent him to jail for contempt of court. An application having been made to the offended dignitary by an attorney for a remittance of the fine and a release of the prisoner, on the ground that there was no contempt of court, as the judge, when acting as auctioneer, was not a court, and therefore not an object of contempt, the legal potentate straightened himself up in his seat, and, with the air of a lord chancellor, replied: "Sir, I'll have you to know that *I* am judge of this parish, — judge all the time; judge from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, — *and as such always an object of contempt!*"

Again, there are prosaic, matter-of-fact persons who are continually ministering to the merriment of their acquaintances by their cold, dull way of viewing and describing poetic things, and by the innocence with which they will blend together the most incongruous matters, without a suspicion of their want of congruity. Thus, some years ago, when the late Mr. Alcott was giving a "conversazione"

at Cambridge, he classified men as the Knower, the Doer, and the Thinker; upon which an old lady looked up from her knitting-work and asked whether by "the Knower" the speaker "meant the man who built the Ark?" Hard, unimaginative scientists and mathematicians are apt to err in this way. It is said that half a century ago, when it was customary in American colleges for the professors to take turns in making the chapel prayers, a professor of chemistry, upon whom the duty devolved one morning, startled the students with the following petition: "Thou knowest, O Lord! that as for tipping lightning-rods silver is better than platinum, so is the mind touched by thy grace made the readiest to receive the principles of science." On another occasion a professor of mathematics is said to have asked the Divine Goodness to enable those present "to know its length, breadth, depth, and also its superficial contents." These stories are hardly credible, true as it is, in more senses than one, that *abeunt studia in mores;* but the next is affirmed to be a statement of fact. Some years ago a Bishop of Oxford wrote to the wardens of the churches in his diocese, asking for confidential information concerning each of the officiating clergymen, such as: "Does he preach the Gospel, and are his carriage and conversation consistent therewith?" From one of the churchwardens a reply came, stating that his rector's "*conversation* was considered very good, but that he did not keep a *carriage*." The sense of the ludicrous was certainly not very strong in the Englishman who, when his daughter ran away with a captain of dragoons, made in a newspaper advertisement the following request: "If the young girl refuse to return to her inconsolable parents, she is desired at least to send back the key of the chest of

linen she has carried off." (*Quære*, was it the key, or the chest, which she carried off?) This almost parallels a scene in an old play in which a son announces his sister's dishonor. "Ruined!" exclaims the father. "Lost, disgraced!" adds the son. Rushing up and down the stage frantically, the father suddenly stops, and wiping the tears from his eyes, exclaims in heart-rending accents: "*Joe, I would n't have had this happen for* £1 2*s.* 3*d.!*"

Longinus tells us that as often as Demosthenes was affected to be pleasant in a speech he made himself ridiculous; and if he chanced to raise a laugh, it was at himself. Milton's clumsy attempts at humor are among the sad exhibitions of literature. Guizot, the luminous historian of civilization, appears to have had little sense of either wit or humor. Sainte-Beuve justly observes that the ridiculous and ironical side of things, of which other historians make too much, has with him no place. "He gives us on the way many stale maxims, but none of those moral reflections which instruct and delight, which recreate humanity and restore it to itself, like those which escape incessantly from Voltaire. His style, which is emphatically his own, *is sad, and never laughs.*" The only jest or bit of humor in his great History looks like an interpolation. It seems as much out of place as on a gravestone or in a sermon.[1]

It was the dry, literal phase of intellect which he believed characterized them, that Charles Lamb disliked in Scotchmen. "I was present," he says, "not long since, at a

[1] Here is the passage: "On comprend ce philosophe à qui l'on vient annoncer que le feu est à la maison, et qui répond: 'Allez le dire à ma femme; je ne me mêle pas des affaires du ménage.' Mais quand il y va de la conscience, de la pensée," etc. — *Histoire de la Civilisation en Europe* (*Sixième Leçon*).

party of North Britons where a son of Burns was expected. and happened to drop a silly expression (in my South British way) that I wished it were the father instead of the son; when four of them started up at once to inform me that 'that was impossible, because he was dead.' An impracticable wish, it seems, was more than they could conceive." A more ludicrous illustration of this turn of mind is furnished by the following incident. In the course of a divorce case which came before Sir Cresswell Cresswell in London, the parties to which were a nobleman of advanced years and his young wife, Sir Cresswell remarked that this was another instance of the evil effects of "marriages contracted between May and December." Shortly afterward the learned judge received a letter from the secretary of a Scotch Statistical Society intimating that the body which he represented would be much obliged if Sir Cresswell would favor them with an account of the facts from which he had derived the singular rule enunciated by him as to *the infelicity of marriages solemnized during the latter months of the year;* and adding that some of the members of the Society wished to draw up the information which might be thus afforded them in the shape of a paper to be read before the Society with a view to public discussion.

Shall we infer from this peculiarity — and that, too, of a small proportion of Scotchmen — that Sawnie has little or no humor, or that it requires, as Sydney Smith said (and he had spent five years in that "land of Calvin, oat-cakes, and sulphur," Scotland), a surgical operation to get a joke well into the Scotch understanding? If this charge is true, it is very singular that Tom Taylor, when editor of "Punch," used to receive, as he said, more jokes from Scotland than

from any other part of the United Kingdom. There are Scotch books which have given a side-ache to hundreds of English and American readers; as, for example, Smollett's "Humphrey Clinker," which Thackeray has called the most laughable work in the English language. Robert Burns seems to have had a streak of fun in his composition when he wrote "Tam O'Shanter," "The Twa Dogs," and his "Address to the Deil." Sir Walter Scott must have had the surgical operation performed on him before he conceived the masterly characters of Dominie Sampson, Caleb Balderstone, Oldbuck of Monkbarns, and Bailie Nicol Jarvie, who "tauld them he would vindicate nae man's faults; but set apart what Rob had done again the law, and the misfortune o' some folk losing life by him, and he was an honester man than stude on any o' their shanks." Once more: who that is familiar with Scottish literature will not plead guilty to having laughed till "his face was like a wet cloak ill laid up" over the illustrations of Scotch wit and humor collected by Dean Ramsay, and to having fairly exploded, burst into an obstreperous roar of cachinnation, over the broad fun, broad as broad Scotch, of Christopher North, as reported in the "Noctes"? It was not, surely, dry, crabbed disquisitions on "meta*phee*sics" that made the Cockneys howl under his knout when he presided over "Blackwood." There are, too, some Americans whose risibles are so easily moved that they "show their teeth i' the way of smile," even when reading the satire of Professor Aytoun. We have even detected what we thought was a grim jest in the pages of Carlyle. The truth doubtless is that Sydney Smith's disparaging remark was merely a mirthful extravagance, not meant to be taken seriously. Justice requires us to state also that some weeks after

it was made he admitted to Robert Chambers that "the Scotch are an immensely funny people, — *only* they need a little operating upon to let the fun out. I know no instrument," added the clerical wag, "so effectual for the purpose as the corkscrew."

There are persons who have a sense of humor as real as that of any mirth-maker, but whose mental machinery moves slowly, though surely. "He is winding up the watch of his wit; by and by it will strike," says Sebastian of Gonzalo, in the "Tempest." As the wit of some men is slow in finding expression, so there are men whose perception of a joke is equally laggard. While others are shaking with laughter at a witticism, they are as silent as the grave; but when at length, after some cogitation, a perception of the point of the joke does dawn upon them, the intensity and duration of their merriment are proportional to the delay in its arrival. Such a slow-witted man was the silent Rev. Mr. Buckle, of whom the wit of Combe Florey said, when he gave his health at a meeting of the Yorkshire clergy, that he was "a Buckle without a tongue." During the roar of laughter that followed the jest, Mr. Buckle sat grim over it, trying to extract its meaning. "Finally," says the wit, "a quarter of an hour after we had all done, he suddenly nudged me, exclaiming: 'I see *now* what you meant, Mr. Smith; you meant a joke.' 'Yes, sir,' I said, 'I believe I did.' Upon which he began laughing so heartily that I thought he would choke, and was obliged to pat him on his back."

Henry Giles, the celebrated popular lecturer, speaking of the gravity of New England audiences some forty or fifty years ago, whose quiet was a sore test to public lecturers, says: "Many a face was farcical in its drum-tight rigidity, and much fun, drollery, and frolic were hidden away

in laughing corners of the heart; not a little, too, of satire and criticism. It was amusing to observe the gradations with which a stoic presiding officer — the pattern and fugleman to the meeting, of immutable propriety — gave way to comic influences which he could not resist. The face would be at first like that of a judge passing sentence of death, then relaxed into wrinkles, then approaching to the placid, then cognate to the pleasant, then a twinkle in the eye, then a twitching of the lip, then facial longitude lessening itself in facial latitude, and at last an exploding laugh; but this was rare." Similar to this shyness and reserve of the New England audience, and like them the result partly of religious and partly of social training, were those of Scotch audiences in "the olden time." When Mrs. Siddons first personated Lady Macbeth in Edinburgh, the audience seemed unimpressionable and dumb. The actress, in despair, made a special effort, and after studying some passages which she thought *must* arouse it, gave them with electric passion and power. For a moment all was as silent as the tomb, when an old man arose in the pit and shouted, "*It's nae bad, that!*" The icy silence was broken, and the entire house broke out in thunders of applause.

There is another class of persons who have the sense of humor, but recognize it only in its coarsest and most palpable manifestations. To tickle their ribs, a joke must be as unequivocal as a pistol-shot. It must be as overwhelmingly funny as Sir Toby Belch's catch, that could "draw three souls out of one weaver." The quiet, delicate, playful humor of Addison, the subtle, stealthy raillery of Thackeray, the exquisite irony of Pascal, the sly satire that hides itself under the cloak of gravity in Cervantes, are wasted on them. The humor which they enjoy is that which

takes the form of mere fun or broad buffoonery, and they enjoy it most when it is acted to them. They do not believe in the existence of electricity unless you can bottle it and carry it in your waistcoat pocket, or stick it on a microscopic pin; and as this is impracticable, sceptics they must remain. Their ancestry may be traced back to the days of Horace, when some Romans, impenetrable to the refined wit and delicate irony of that poet, preferred the coarse humor and quibbling jests which disgraced the old comic drama.

Again, there are persons who discern quickly enough the point of a joke, yet who, in attempting to repeat it for the amusement of others, miss the point, substituting other words for the vital ones on which the wit turns. Looking for an explosion of laughter after the recital, they are astonished that none follows. There is a threadbare story of a man who, on being told that his coat was too short, replied: "It will be long enough before I get another." A person who had overheard the conversation, in trying to repeat it made the wag say: "It will be *a long time* before I get another." In the chapter on "Puns and Punsters" I have cited an apologetic pun made at a dinner-party by Lord Sandwich when a servant let fall a neat's tongue: "Never mind, it is only a *lapsus linguæ*." An alderman, who was present, treasured the witticism in his memory, — *quare mox depromere posset*, — and repeating it when his own servant let drop a leg of *mutton*, was greatly surprised and chagrined at the jest's falling flat.

Those of our readers who were fortunate enough to enjoy the acquaintance of the Rev. T. Starr King know that he was a brilliant wit, who equally enjoyed making and hearing a witticism. Among the friends who sometimes accom-

panied him in his annual visits to the White Mountains — whose scenery he has so vividly and picturesquely portrayed — was Abel T., a Boston bookseller of a somewhat prosaic cast of mind. Riding one day in the mountains with him and several clergymen, Mr. King, as they passed some elder-bushes, remarked: "We have good authority, you see, for our sport, as all the *elders* are having a *blow*." Abel T. was delighted with the *jeu de mots*, and on the following Monday, when the Universalist clergy of "the Hub" were gathered, as usual, at his bookstore, undertook to repeat the joke for their amusement. "Heard a capital joke by Starr," said he, "when we were at the mountains." "Let 's hear it!" they all eagerly cried. "Well, it was this. We were riding up a hill, and were all very merry, when, as we passed some bushes that were beginning to blossom, Starr quietly pointed to them, and observed that 'we had good authority for our merriment, as all *the elder-bushes were blown out!*'" No explosion, not even a titter, followed; all the listeners were as grave as owls. "Why don't you laugh?" exclaimed the disappointed narrator, biting his lips with disappointment, and staring at the black-coated and white-cravated listeners whom he had expected to see grinning from ear to ear. "Why," they replied, "we don't see the point!" "Nor I either," said the crest-fallen story-teller, after a moment's reflection, and with a puzzled look; "and yet it sounded very funny when Starr said it." Abel's report of Starr King's jest recalls the story of another pun made some thirty years ago. A bachelor having told a friend that Governor Wise of Virginia had just been married, was reminded that he had better go and do *like Wise*. Attempting afterward to pass off the witticism as his own, he unfortunately told the per-

son whom he undertook to advise that he had better go and do *as Governor Wise did*, — which, strange to say, was greeted with a dead silence. Evidently, it is not every vessel that can carry a joke.

The ability to discover a comic point, to appreciate a humorous hit, or to enjoy the fun of a ludicrous position, is a valuable gift, and they who lack it are to be pitied. Of how much innocent amusement, of what a prolific source of harmless and recreating merriment, are they deprived! Compared with them, the old gentleman of threescore and ten, with whom Charles Lamb boarded in 1829, who "had one joke and forty pounds a year, upon which he retired in a green old age," was a mortal to be envied. How many persons, on the other hand, amid the alternations of joy and sorrow that brighten or darken their lives, have found an inexhaustible and ever-fresh fountain of gladness in the comic vein, the irrepressible humor, of some merry and mirthful friend! Unhappily, besides those persons who have little or no sense of humor, and are therefore pardonable if they do not sympathize with the merriment of their fellows, society is sometimes afflicted with excessively grave and formal people, who think it not "respectable" to jest or to laugh at a jest, — owl-like persons who, as Henry Giles says, are as grim in their silence as if "the integral and differential calculus" were in their every wrinkle. Fearful of compromising their dignity by relaxing their starch and stiffness, living in the bondage and gloom of perpetual subservience to Mrs. Grundy, they let the brightest flashes of wit pass unheeded, "as o'er the impassive ice the lightnings play," or scowl at them with affected contempt. If we may give credit to the opinions of these vinegar-visaged men, who, as Butler said of the

Duke of Buckingham, endure pleasures with less patience than other men do their pains, length of face is length of wisdom, and rigidity of muscle the infallible index of sound judgment. Such persons would have society believe that they have something too weighty on their minds to permit them to attend to humorists —

> "Whose influence is begot of that loose grace
> Which shallow-laughing hearers give to fools;"

but in many cases the actual truth is that the only weight they carry is that of gold and silver, which is more than compensated by vacuity of the cerebrum. Rich they may be as Crœsus; they may be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day on canvas-backs and Château Yquem, —

> "But oh! the choice, what heart can doubt,
> Of chops with wit, or turtle without?"

So far is a formal, demure, unaltered cast of features from being a proof of wisdom that it is the almost invariable mask of dulness. Lord Bolingbroke said truly that gravity is the very essence of imposture; and a finer observer than Bolingbroke — one of the finest observers, indeed, that ever lived — defines it as a mysterious carriage of the body invented to cover the defects of the mind. Joe Miller is authority for the opinion that, as the gravest beast is an ass, the gravest bird an owl, and the gravest fish an oyster, so the gravest man is a fool. Cicero tells us of one of those affectedly grave men of whom we have just spoken, — Piso, — that when he answered the orator he had a trick of fetching one of his eyebrows up to his forehead, and dropping the other down to his chin. Fuller says

truly of such charlatans that "they do wisely to counterfeit a reservedness, and to keep their chests always locked, not for fear any should steal treasure thence, but lest some should look in and see that there is nothing within them. But they who are born eunuchs deserve no such great commendation for their chastity. Wonder not that such men are grave, but wonder at them if they be not grave." Burns thus addresses them: —

> "O ye douce folk that live by rule,
> Grave, tideless, blooded, calm, and cool,
> Compared wi' you, — O fool! fool! fool!
> How much unlike!
> Your hearts are just a standing pool,
> Your lives a dike!"

Coleridge tells of one of these solemn-looking persons who was among a dinner-party, and whom all the others took for an incarnation of wisdom, because while they were all chattering, he never once wagged his tongue. By and by some apple-dumplings were brought in, when, throwing up both hands in an ecstasy of delight, he cried out: "Ah! them 's the jockies for me!" The following incident is related by the London "Pall Mall Gazette:" —

"A certain great lady in Paris aims at converting her house into a sort of Hôtel Rambouillet, and with that object gives periodical dinners, at which assemble most of the best-known wits and *literati* of the day. The rule of the mansion is that while a person discourses, no interruption whatever can be permitted. It is said that M. Renan once attended one of these dinners, and being in excellent vein, talked without a break during the whole repast. Toward the end of dinner a guest was heard to commence a sentence, but he was instantly silenced by the hostess. After they had left the table, however, she at once informed the extinguished individual that as M. Renan had

now finished his conversation, she would gladly hear what he had to say. The guest modestly declined; the hostess insisted. 'I am certain it was something of consequence,' she said. 'Alas! madame,' he answered, 'it was indeed, but now it is too late. I should have liked a little more of that ice-pudding!'"

We are aware that there are some men who by natural temperament are habitually serious, and that other men are sometimes made so by bitter experiences, weighty responsibilities, and crushing cares. The sunniest life has its gloomy hours, the holiest its remorseful ones, and every life should have its solemn ones. Against the gravity of such men and on such occasions we are not protesting, but only against that of —

> "A sort of men, whose visages
> Do cream and mantle, like a standing pond;
> And do a wilful stillness entertain,
> With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
> Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit;
> As who should say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
> And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!'"

Such a man was the Duke of Somerset, whose second wife is said to have been the most beautiful woman in England. She once suddenly threw her arms round his neck and gave him a kiss "which might have gladdened the heart of an emperor." Lifting his head pompously up, and giving his shoulders an aristocratic square, the duke slowly said: "Madam, my first wife was a Howard, and she would never have taken such a liberty!" Such a man, again, was Harley (afterward Earl of Oxford), of whom Macaulay tells us that he constantly had, even with his best friends, an air of mystery and reserve, which seemed to indicate that he knew some momentous secret, and that his mind

was laboring with some vast design. In this way he got and long kept a high reputation for wisdom. "It was not till that reputation had made him an Earl, a Knight of the Garter, Lord High Treasurer of England, and master of the fate of Europe, that his admirers began to find out that he was really a dull, puzzle-headed man."

Still another such man, if we may believe contemporary satirists, was England's great statesman, William Pitt, who is popularly supposed to have been as stiff and stately in private life as in the House of Commons. Just as Mrs. Siddons was said to stab the potatoes at dinner, and to order tea in the tone and with the measured words of a tragedy queen, so Pitt, according to tradition, was always on stilts, and would —

> "Pass muffins in committee of supply,
> And buttered toast amend by adding dry."

But, happily, we now know, from Lord Stanhope's biography of his kinsman, that so far from being as hard and cold as the faithful statue which represents him in the Parliament building, Pitt was to his friends pre-eminently playful. Like Shakspeare's Hermione, placed on her pedestal, "the seeming marble trembles into life and feeling as we draw nearer, and he who a minute before seemed the very embodiment of official impassiveness, brightens or melts anon into some outbreak of that softer nature which still lurked under the thick crust of his outward demeanor." His sense of fun, though hidden in public by a mask of grave dignity, was really in private his most marked characteristic. He did not restrain himself from public exhibitions of this faculty from false ideas of dignity, but from motives of political policy.

Of all the mistakes made by men in judging of their fellows, none is greater or more common than that of associating frivolity of character with sportiveness. As we have said elsewhere, we are not to suppose that the elephant's trunk is incapable of felling a man because we see it toying with a feather; we do not infer that the oak lacks stability because its light and changeable leaves dance to the music of the breeze; nor may we conclude that a man wants solidity and strength of mind because he may occasionally be playful. Yet how often it happens that the man who goes through the world with an owl-like solemnity of face and a constant gravity of demeanor is regarded as showing a deeper sense of life's meaning, and to be making more of his abilities, than the elastic, sunny, playful man. Not so thought the Roman Emperor Titus, who felt that he had lost a day if he passed it without laughing. Not so thought that profound thinker, Sir William Hamilton, whose professional propriety was sometimes overcome even in the class-room by his sense of the ludicrous, which threw him into a fit of laughter that was for the time utterly uncontrollable. Not so thought Archbishop Whately, of whose witticisms, made in his hours of relaxation, we have given many examples. We are told by his biographer that when he became Archbishop of Dublin, many men who had formerly dangled about the viceregal court of Lord Chesterfield were shocked by his Grace's lack of gravity. On their sensitive tympani his rough and ready words grated like the rattling of a cart laden with iron rods. "Their eyes, bloodshot with rage and fashionable indulgence, were not improved by the startling exhibition of the archbishop smoking a long pipe as he sat on the chains in front of his house in St. Stephen's Green, or as he sauntered along the

Donnybrook Road." Not less must their notions of "the linen decencies of life" have been shocked when he sought relief from a headache, after some severe intellectual effort, by cutting down a tree or digging up the earth, all the while stripped to his shirt-sleeves; or when he was hand-in-glove with the peasantry who worked for him, as described in the following incident: "Soon after his first arrival at his country house of Still-Organ, the hay was ripe, and a number of men were called in to mow and make it. They were resting for a moment to refresh themselves on the food which the archbishop supplied, when Whately found them. 'Are you good runners?' he said. 'Yes, your Honor,' replied several; 'we ran agin' the east wind yesterday, and bate it.' 'Well, now, I 'll give this half-crown to the man that first touches that tree.' The tree grew at the other end of the field, and the field was a wide one. Up sprang all the mowers, and the archbishop, standing behind, gave the word: 'Once, twice, thrice, and away!' Away they went, and the foremost were nearing the tree, when rapid steps were heard behind them, and a pair of long legs swept by them all. It was the archbishop himself, who, touching the tree, turned round, and laughed immoderately, — an exercise in which, after a moment given to blank astonishment, the whole field joined; and he put the half-crown back into his own pocket."

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